

June 1, 2022

Somalia Ops

Update 01: U.S. Troops Heading Back Into Somalia, Reversing Trump Order

Several hundred U.S. servicemembers will be again stationed inside Somalia to help combat growing al-Shabab terrorist forces there, administration officials confirmed 16 MAY. The move reverses an order by President Donald Trump 18 months ago to remove all U.S. military forces from the country over the objections of Pentagon officials. Before then, about 700 American troops had been stationed in the country, helping to train local forces in their fight against terrorist groups. White House officials said that President Joe Biden made the move to “re-establish a persistent U.S. military presence in Somalia” in response to concerns about the growing strength of al-Shabab in the region, along with other threats affiliated with al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

The mission will include both training friendly Somali forces to combat the terrorist groups and assist on operations “to try and dislodge Shabab from what is a significant amount of territory that it purports to govern and hold.” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin requested the move as a way to build on U.S. military airstrikes in the region “to increase the safety and effectiveness of our special operators,” a senior administration official said. Even after the Trump order, U.S. forces continued deploying to Somalia for short rotations to train and facilitate counter-terrorism operations. But military leaders have categorized those restrictions as problematic.

In testimony before the Senate in March, Army Gen. Stephen Townsend, head of U.S. Africa Command, called the current arrangement “not effective.” “It’s not efficient, and it puts our troops at greater risk,” Townsend said. Administration officials would not say how many troops will be deployed, but said it will be fewer than 500. They also did not specify which units will be sent, but said the personnel would come “from U.S. forces that are already generally stationed in that region of Africa.” The senior administration official also emphasized that the move “will not change the scope of the mission that our special operators have conducted in Somalia ... and also will not significantly change the Defense Department’s overall posture and resource dedication in East Africa.”

Al-Shabab fighters have killed at least 12 Americans in East Africa in recent years, including three defense contractors during an attack on a military site in Kenya in 2020. White House officials said the group has also focused efforts in recent years to plan attacks outside of Africa against western targets, underscoring the need to counter the group’s ambitions as soon

as possible. The move comes a day after Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who served as Somalia's president between 2012 and 2017, was announced on Sunday as the winner of the country's most recent presidential election. U.S. officials described him as "consistent" in his opposition to the terrorist groups in the region. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 16, 2022 ++]

UFO Incidents

Update 01: UFOs Pose Real Danger, DOD Says, but Aliens Aren't To Blame

Defense Department officials on 17 MAY confirmed that unidentified flying objects are real and pose a potential serious threat to the country. However, they aren't panicking about aliens invading America anytime soon. That's because military officials believe that nearly all of the unexplained events could be explained with more research and observation. To do that, they need military members to be more open to reporting the mystery objects without fear of being laughed off as science fiction conspiracy theorists.

"We are attempting to explain what may be natural phenomenon, or sensory phenomenon, or legitimate counterintelligence threats to places where we have [military] bases or platforms," said Ronald Moultrie, under secretary of defense for intelligence, in testimony before the House Intelligence Committee. "Hopefully, if we get more information out there, we'll start to lessen the impact of some of those spurious reports." During the hearing — the first public hearing on UFOs before Congress in more than 50 years — military officials acknowledged that sightings of "unidentified aerial phenomena" have jumped significantly over the last two decades.

Scott Bray, deputy director of Naval Intelligence, said the reports are "frequent and continuing," especially around military bases and training areas. A Defense Department intelligence report last year detailed 144 UFO encounters between 2004 and 2020. Bray said there have been 11 "near misses" with military aircraft from the unknown objects. Pentagon leaders are establishing a new office focused on the UAPs, "to facilitate the identification of previously unknown or unidentified airborne objects in a methodically logical and standardized manner," Moultrie said.

Officials said most of those events likely have mundane explanations — things like commercial drones and "airborne clutter" — that cannot be proven because of a lack of data on the incidents. In many cases, the reports come from pilots flying by objects at high speed, spotting something amiss for only a second or less. But Bray said at least some could pose significant threats, either from foreign adversaries or accidental collisions. Less likely (though,

officials acknowledged, not completely debunked) is the possibility of alien life watching humans from the skies above. “We have no material, we have detected no emanations within the UAP Task Force that would suggest it’s anything non-terrestrial in origin,” Bray said.

Both lawmakers and the defense witnesses said public hearings like Tuesday’s are important to calm conspiracy theories about the military hiding proof of alien life. Public discussions are also key to encouraging the collection of more information on sightings so there can be a rigorous scientific analysis of every incident, officials said. Several committee members pressed the defense officials for any additional evidence of extraterrestrial encounters. They also acknowledged that the Pentagon’s explanations are unlikely to stop public speculation about possible alien encounters being covered up by military leaders. Indeed, after the public session, the committee held a closed, classified briefing continuing discussion on the topic, a move they conceded was both problematic and necessary to protect sensitive military information.

Moultrie, who confessed to being a big science fiction fan during his testimony, said the Defense Department is open to all potential explanations for the UFOs. But rather than looking to outer space for answers, officials are looking anywhere they can for better data. “We are all curious and we seek to understand the unknown,” Moultrie said. “And as a lifelong intelligence professional, I’m impatient. I want the immediate explanations for this as much as anyone else. “However, understanding can take significant time and effort.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 17, 2022 ++]

-52 Stratofortress Bomber

Update 07: CERP Costs Jumps by Half in New Estimate of Refit

The cost of the B-52 re-engining program has increased 50 percent because of integration issues, according to revelations in a House Armed Services panel hearing. Air Force acquisition executive Andrew P. Hunter acknowledged the B-52 Commercial Engine Replacement Program (CERP) price hike as voiced in a question from Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA) in testimony on service modernization. “We currently believe there is cost growth from our design work that we did originally through the middle-tier acquisition program to what we anticipate we’ll be looking at [in] Milestone B,” which evaluates readiness for entry into the engineering and manufacturing development phase, Hunter said.

The B-52 CERP has been conducted as a middle-tier acquisition program to get underway rapidly and develop a prototype system but is now moving to a “traditional” program, and the Air Force is firming up the costs it expects to pay, Hunter said. The cost increases have more to do with integrating the engines on the B-52, which is a Boeing effort, and has less to do with the

engines themselves, which will be built by Rolls-Royce, he added. “I want to emphasize that a lot of that engineering work is actually inside the airplane, on the support struts, to which the engines attach, versus the engine itself, which is largely a commercial engine that already exists,” Hunter said. The engine needs only “a modest number of modifications,” he said. “So it’s really about re-engineering 1960s aircraft to perform all the way through” to the end of the B-52’s lifetime, now envisioned as circa 2050.

The Air Force told Congress a year ago that the CERP effort had increased in cost by nine percent because of pandemic-related supply issues, to about \$11 billion. Hunter did not speculate on a new cost estimate. The end of the risk reduction and prototyping phase is rapidly approaching, Hunter said, and when it’s done, “we’ll have an effective design ... [that will] allow us to go into an acquisition program to allow us to do that re-engining.” At Milestone B, “we will ... have in our hands the real, full cost of what it will take to do it, and we’ll set the original baseline for the full program ... at that point,” Hunter said. The Air Force will “assess” at that milestone whether “it still make sense to move forward with that program,” Hunter said, adding, however, that “we will need a new engine for the B-52 to get it out to its full lifetime.”

In an email response to a query from Air Force magazine, Boeing said the “50 percent differential in the CERP cost comes from an original, 2017 government estimate produced by the Air Force program office, compared to the latest 2022 estimate. The company said it “is our understanding that the government’s estimate has been adjusted over the years from the initial business case analysis, developed at a very early phase of the acquisition, to incorporate additional complexity” as well as “further historical fidelity on similar programs, as well as additional understanding of technical scope and complexity of the design.”

Rolls-Royce North America said through a spokesperson that the company “has been collaborating closely with the Air Force and program integrator Boeing on the CERP program.” There have been “no changes in engine pricing since the contract was awarded.” The Air Force was not able to comment on the B-52 CERP cost increase by press time.

The CERP seeks to integrate eight new Rolls-Royce F130 engines per aircraft to replace the Pratt & Whitney TF33s, which are original equipment on the B-52Hs, built in 1962. The engines will be digitally controlled, requiring new pylons, new twin-engine nacelles, and wiring to connect the powerplants to the B-52 cockpit. The project is part of an overall modernization of the B-52 fleet that includes digital wiring, new communications, and a new radar, among other improvements. [Source: Air Force Magazine | John A. Tirpak | May 19, 2022 ++]

Taiwan-China Dispute

Update 15: Biden | U.S. Will Intervene Militarily If China Were To Invade

For the third time on 23 MAY President Joe Biden said that the U.S. would intervene militarily if China were to invade Taiwan, saying the burden to protect Taiwan is “even stronger” after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. It was one of the most forceful presidential statements in support of self-governing in decades. Biden, at a news conference in Tokyo, said “yes” when asked if he was willing to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan if China invaded. “That’s the commitment we made,” His comment one provoked hasty administration “clarifications” that nothing’s changed.

The U.S. traditionally has avoided making such an explicit security guarantee to Taiwan, with which it no longer has a mutual defense treaty, instead maintaining a policy of “strategic ambiguity” about how far it would be willing to go if China invaded. The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which has governed U.S. relations with the island, does not require the U.S. to step in militarily to defend Taiwan if China invades, but makes it American policy to ensure Taiwan has the resources to defend itself and to prevent any unilateral change of status in Taiwan by Beijing.

Biden’s comments drew a sharp response from the mainland, which has claimed Taiwan to be a rogue province. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin expressed “strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition” to Biden’s comments. “China has no room for compromise or concessions on issues involving China’s core interests such as sovereignty and territorial integrity.” He added, “China will take firm action to safeguard its sovereignty and security interests, and we will do what we say.” A White House official said Biden’s comments did not reflect a policy shift.

Speaking alongside Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Biden said any effort by China to use force against Taiwan would “just not be appropriate,” adding that it “will dislocate the entire region and be another action similar to what happened in Ukraine.” China has stepped up its military provocations against democratic Taiwan in recent years aimed at intimidating it into accepting Beijing’s demands to unify with the communist mainland. “They’re already flirting with danger right now by flying so close and all the maneuvers that are undertaken,” Biden said of China.

Under the “one China” policy, the U.S. recognizes Beijing as the government of China and doesn’t have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. However, the U.S. maintains unofficial contacts including a de facto embassy in Taipei, the capital, and supplies military equipment for the island’s defense. Biden said it is his “expectation” that China would not try to seize Taiwan by force, but he said that assessment “depends upon just how strong the world makes clear that that

kind of action is going to result in long-term disapprobation by the rest of the community.” He added that deterring China from attacking Taiwan was one reason why it’s important that Russian President Vladimir Putin “pay a dear price for his barbarism in Ukraine,” lest China and other nations get the idea that such action is acceptable.

Fearing escalation with nuclear-armed Russia, Biden quickly ruled out putting U.S. forces into direct conflict with Russia, but he has shipped billions of dollars in U.S. military assistance that has helped Ukraine put up a stiffer-than-expected resistance to Russia’s onslaught. Taipei cheered Biden’s remarks, with Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Joanne Ou expressing “sincere welcome and gratitude” for the comments. The challenge posed by China to the security of the Taiwan Strait has drawn great concern in the international community,” said Ou. “Taiwan will continue to improve its self-defense capabilities, and deepen cooperation with the United States and Japan and other like-minded countries to jointly defend the security of the Taiwan Strait and the rules-based international order, while promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.”

It’s not the first time Biden has pledged to defend Taiwan against a Chinese attack, only for administration officials to later claim there had been no change to American policy. In a CNN town hall in October, Biden was asked about using the U.S. military to defend Taiwan and replied, “Yes, we have a commitment to do that.” Biden’s comments came just before he formally launched a long-anticipated Indo-Pacific trade pact that excludes Taiwan.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan confirmed Sunday that Taiwan isn’t among the governments signed up for the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, which is meant to allow the U.S. to work more closely with key Asian economies on issues like supply chains, digital trade, clean energy and anticorruption. Inclusion of Taiwan would have irked China. Sullivan said the U.S. wants to deepen its economic partnership with Taiwan on a one-to-one basis. [Source: AP | Josh Boak, Amer Madhani, & Zeke Miller | May 23, 2022 ++]

DoD Housing Program

Update 11: Pentagon Asked to Expand Review of Contractor’s Performance

A bipartisan pair of senators is calling for the Pentagon to expand a review of military housing owned by Balfour Beatty Communities following the lawmakers' own scathing investigation that found the company continues to ignore residents' concerns about hazardous living conditions. The Army already announced a new probe in response to the recent report from the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, or PSI, and a subsequent hearing the

subcommittee held about its report. Now, the leaders of that subcommittee are pressing the Pentagon to expand the probe to the Navy and Air Force.

"Balfour pled guilty to fraud against all three military service branches -- the Air Force and the Navy as well as the Army," Sens. Jon Ossoff (D-GA) and Ron Johnson (R-WI) wrote in a letter 20 MAY to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. "Further, the information uncovered by PSI's inquiry and at the April 26th hearing suggests that Balfour has continued to mistreat military families and to record inaccurate and incomplete work order data in its internal Yardi system at non-Army installations," added Ossoff and Johnson, the chairman and ranking member of the subcommittee, respectively. The Pentagon declined to comment on the letter to Military.com beyond saying the department is aware of it and will respond to the senators' offices.

Asked for comment on the letter, a spokesperson for Balfour Beatty maintained the company's "top priority is to support the safety, health and wellbeing of our residents, and we always take their concerns seriously. We reconfirmed this to Senator Ossoff when we submitted a formal rebuttal to the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations indicating that we disagreed with a significant number of the findings in its Staff Report because they were either inaccurate or mischaracterized events," the spokesperson added. "We have also shared the rebuttal document with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy."

In December, Balfour Beatty pleaded guilty to defrauding the Army, Air Force and Navy after having been found to have manipulated maintenance records from 2013 to 2019 to obtain performance bonuses as a housing management contractor. As part of the plea, the company agreed to pay \$65 million in fines and restitution. Last month, Ossoff and Johnson released a report that found issues persisted after 2019 that "bear striking similarities to the types of conduct which Balfour admitted to in its December 2021 guilty plea." The report focused largely on Fort Gordon in Ossoff's home state of Georgia and detailed residents' struggles to get Balfour Beatty to fix mold, asbestos, roof leaks and other dangerous and unhealthy living conditions.

Balfour Beatty provides housing for 150,000 military residents in 26 states, including more than 15,500 Air Force homes, more than 18,900 Army homes and more than 8,600 Navy homes. Earlier this month in response to the Senate investigation, the Army announced the commanding general of Army Materiel Command is overseeing a new review of Balfour Beatty housing at Fort Gordon. The Army is also auditing Balfour Beatty's property management records at Fort Gordon, suspending any requests for performance bonuses in the interim. And the Army's top lawyer is reviewing possible enforcement options, including whether the service can amend contracts with privatized housing operators.

But in their letter to Austin, Ossoff and Johnson said they are concerned the Army's actions "are not sufficient," while asking for reviews to be expanded to cover the Air Force and Navy.

The pair also asked whether the Defense Department has access to all original maintenance requests submitted by service members and families rather than just the housing companies' internal databases, as well as whether Austin thinks the Pentagon and military services need any additional legal authority to improve oversight of private housing companies. The senators wrote they are seeking answers to "ensure the welfare of our military service members and their families, and to protect the taxpayers from potential fraud." [Source: Military.com | Rebecca Kheel | May 23, 2022 ++]

Military Base Name Changes

Update 05: Commission Recommendations Released

The Army's Fort Bragg would become Fort Liberty under recommendations released 24 MAY by a commission that studied whether military bases with Confederate ties should be renamed. The commission also suggests that eight other bases be renamed for military heroes. However, a source familiar with the commission's deliberations told Defense One that the suggested name for the North Carolina base, which is home to Army Special Operations Command, was driven by parochial posturing, not racism. Leaders of various Army units, including some in the special operations community, didn't want the base to be "named for anyone not from their tribe," and vetoed some of the candidates. Members of the local community pushed for Liberty, which represents a founding value for both the nation and the Army, according to a press release from the commission.

Congress created the commission in the 2021 Defense Authorization Act as part of an effort to address systemic racism in the military. The panel will share its final report on renaming the nine bases with lawmakers no later than Oct. 1. That report is also expected to include an estimate of the cost of making the changes. The final names were picked from a list of 34,000 suggestions made by the American public, which was whittled down to fewer than 100 finalists. If the recommendations are adopted, some of the bases will make history as the first named for women and Black Americans.

Ty Seidule, vice chair of the naming commission, told reporters that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has the authority to direct base namings. But the next steps, and whether Congress has a say in the decision, are a bit murkier. One lawmaker is already expected to fight the name changes on Capitol Hill. A robocall supporting Rep. Mo Brooks (R-AL) in his Senate primary on 24 MAY said the congressman will "filibuster this evil nonsense" if he wins the seat, the Washington Post reported, though it did not state what bill or spending proposal he may try to

stall. The campaign said it agreed with the call's message and that Brooks "has been outspoken that we shouldn't be replacing monuments."

"The Commission believes Austin has sole authority to approve the names," the source said. "But if you check DOD's recent communications with Congress, DOD said he doesn't have the authority. So that's the awkwardness." If it is entirely up to Austin, the new names will likely win easy approval. The defense secretary released a statement saying he was "pleased" to see the recommendations and looked forward to the final report, but made no mention of consulting with lawmakers or seeking further approval from Congress. "Today's announcement highlights the Commission's efforts to propose nine new installation names that reflect the courage, values, sacrifices, and diversity of our military men and women," he said.

Democrats also quickly praised the recommendations. Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), chair of the House Armed Services Committee, said the new base names represent "a new opportunity to foster a more inclusive environment for our service members." Rep. Anthony Brown (D-MD), a retired Army officer and member of the House Armed Services Committee, also commended the changes. "I learned to fly helicopters at Ft. Rucker. I deployed to Iraq from Ft. Bragg, and I earned my jump wings at Ft. Benning. All these bases honored men who wouldn't want me or other Black Americans serving in uniform," Brown said in a statement. "We cannot ask today's servicemen and women to defend our country, while housing and training them and their families on installations celebrating those who betrayed our country in order to enslave others and preserve white supremacy."

Of the nine bases expected to get new names, two are named for Black Americans. Asked why so many bases were renamed for white men, members of the commission said that they had to make difficult decisions because there are so many military heroes and a small number of bases. "It was a privilege to identify a group of Americans that all Americans can draw inspiration from and that help us move past a time when major American installations were named for people who took up arms against the government," said Kori Schake, a former Pentagon official and member of the naming commission. The recommended new base names are:

- Fort Benning, Ga., to become **Fort Moore** after Hal Moore, a retired lieutenant general, and Julia Moore. Hal received the Distinguished Service Cross for actions during the Vietnam War; and his wife Julia changed how the military notifies family members of casualties to deliver the news in a more compassionate way.
- Fort Bragg, N.C., to become **Fort Liberty** after the founding principles of the nation, and the 82nd Airborne Division's song that goes "We're all-American [and] proud to be, for we are the soldiers of liberty."

- Fort Gordon, Ga., to become **Fort Eisenhower** after President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who served as supreme commander of the allied expeditionary force in Europe during World War II before becoming president.
- Fort A.P. Hill, Va., to become **Fort Walker** after Dr. Mary Walker, who volunteered as a civilian to be a doctor for troops during the Civil War because she was not allowed to join the military as a woman.
- Fort Hood, Texas, to become **Fort Cavazos** after Richard Cavazos, a Texan who received the Distinguished Service Cross during the Korean War.
- Fort Lee, Va., to become **Fort Gregg-Adams** after two Army logisticians. Arthur Gregg enlisted to work on supply logistics in Germany during World War II, applied to officer candidate school when the military was desegregated, and retired as a lieutenant general. Lt. Col. Charity Adams joined the military after the attack on Pearl Harbor and led a postal battalion in Europe during the war.
- Fort Pickett, Va., to become **Fort Barfoot** after 2nd Lt. Van T. Barfoot, who received the Medal of Honor for actions during World War II.
- Fort Polk, La., to become **Fort Johnson** for Sgt. William Henry Johnson, who received the Medal of Honor for fighting Germans first with grenades, then with bullets, then with the butt of his rifle before resorting to a knife during World War I.
- Fort Rucker, Ala., to become **Fort Novosel** for Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael Novosel Sr., who earned the Medal of Honor during Vietnam for flying an aircraft through enemy fire to save 29 men.

[Source: Defense One | Jacqueline Feldscher | May 24, 2022 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery

Update 98: Upcoming Unjust Changes Need Fixing

The Expanding America’s National Cemetery Act of 2022 has yet to be introduced in either chamber. A draft version of the law doesn’t specifically address the planned reduction of eligibility at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC), but it takes significant steps toward a long-term solution. The bill would:

- Authorize the transformation of a VA-run national cemetery “to continue provision of full military honors” prior to Arlington reaching capacity. This would remove the space restrictions at Arlington which led to the ill-conceived eligibility changes now working their way through the federal rulemaking process.
- Ensure all eligibility criteria used for full military honors at the proposed cemetery are the same as those in effect for ANC as of March 31, 2022. This would make Congress’ intent

clear regarding eligibility changes beyond that date, increasing the likelihood of the current process staying in place.

- Require a joint DoD/VA report covering both cemetery expansion and any new eligibility criteria, paying special attention to women veterans and to those whose military careers did not include service in combat. This further clarifies Congress' intent to better account for these groups in the eligibility process.

Original co-sponsors of this legislation will be key to its success, either as a standalone bill or included in the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). That's why MOAA is asking veterans to reach out now, even before the bill is introduced, to rally support behind this critical measure at this critical time.

Despite its Southern Expansion, and despite eligibility restrictions designed to extend the life of the cemetery, ANC eventually will run out of room. Changing the rules is a cost-cutting measure – one that comes on the backs of military retirees and others whose final plans included burial at a national cemetery. It's also shortsighted – a long-term solution involving the transformation of an existing VA national cemetery is cost-sensitive and establishes efficiencies by relying on existing VA expertise.

And it's discriminatory: As the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) put it in a February letter to congressional leadership, "Suddenly, most living veterans eligible for burial at ANC, many of whom served in critical operations at sea or in the air and all but a few women – who were barred by law from service in combat occupations and units until recently – will be denied internment at ANC despite their dedication, gallant, and often dangerous service to their Country."

The House and Senate Armed Services Committees will begin marking up the NDAA in the coming weeks. The House Armed Services Committee included report language in last year's NDAA for a joint DoD and VA report on the ANC issue, with unanimous consent, only to have it removed by the Senate. Outreach to your elected officials, especially your two senators, will help improve the chances for the Expanding America's National Cemetery act to be included in the FY 2023 NDAA. If you've already sent a message, consider a follow-up phone call. Use MOAA's Capital Hotline – 866-272-MOAA (6622), a toll-free line to the U.S. Capitol switchboard – to connect with your legislators' offices. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Mark Belinsky | May 26, 2022 ++]

VA EHR

Update 37: Glitches Continue to Plague System Rollout

The VA first launched its new electronic health record (EHR) system over 19 months ago — some in Congress would describe these as long, problematic months. Nevertheless, progress has occurred since the VA joined with DoD in a joint contract to modernize its EHR system in 2017. The massive \$16 billion project raised lots of concerns with lawmakers after decades of attempts by both departments to develop a joint interoperable health record that never materialized.

The VA conducted its first launch of the new system in the fall of 2020 at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, Wash. Due to concerns about patient safety, training, employee morale, and other deployment issues, the VA secretary paused the electronic health record modernization (EHRM) project for a year to mitigate problems before future deployments. The department used the time to refine governance and management structures, and to resolve deployment issues at Mann-Grandstaff. With the reset complete, the VA resumed deployments this year. The VA EHR deployed 26 MAR at the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla, Wash., and 30 APR at the VA Central Ohio Healthcare System in Columbus, Ohio.

The additional deployments have sparked more concerns and a myriad of questions from Congress, watchdog groups, and veterans' organizations – including lingering concerns that the VA has not fully resolved all the problems since its first launch at Mann-Grandstaff. The VA has been working diligently on Capitol Hill and with stakeholder groups and the media – and, more importantly, with veterans and VA employees – in recent months to alleviate some of these concerns.

Most massive technology projects, including health record system rollouts, face some glitches or setbacks. Correcting flaws and incorporating lessons learned are part of the journey. The VA's EHRM project is no exception. The department has fully backed the project, starting at the very top with the secretary and his leadership team — assuring Congress, veterans, and VA employees that the VA “remains steadfast to getting this right” as a model for transformative health innovation.

“This electronic health record rollout is an important step in our progress toward a single instance of medical record connecting VA, the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Coast Guard that will provide patients with seamless care from active duty to VA status,” said Dr. Terry Adirim, program executive director of VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization Integration Office. “With each VA site that adopts this system, we gain momentum. The lessons we carry forward from site to site are refining our rollouts and improving end-user experiences.”

However, significant problems continue, tracing back to the project's inception. A DoD and VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) joint audit in May found even though both departments took action to achieve interoperability by acquiring Cerner Millennium, deploying the EHR system at 49 DoD locations and one VA health care facility, and launching the Joint Health Information Exchange, they did not take all the actions needed to achieve full interoperability. For example, they did not:

- Consistently migrate patient health care information from the legacy system into the new system to create a single, complete patient record.
- Develop interfaces from all medical devices so patient information could be uploaded to the new system.
- Ensure users were granted limited access to the new system to a level necessary to perform their duties.

The audit also highlighted oversight and funding issues with the DoD-VA Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization Program (FEHRM) Office. The FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act required the joint office to take a more active role in developing and implementing a plan to achieve interoperability. The program office's primary role up to this point had been facilitating discussions in disputes or providing direction. The office director told inspectors more resources and authorities from DoD and the VA would be needed to meet the legislative mandate.

Last month, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization held a hearing for the VA EHRM executive director and the VA OIG to provide updates on the system. The VA reported the Cerner EHR was successfully implemented at half of the U.S. sites and that lessons learned from DoD rollouts and deployments at Mann-Grandstaff were used in the Walla Walla deployment and the then-upcoming launch in Columbus. The OIG highlighted outstanding issues from its first five reports released after the Mann-Grandstaff launch. Of the 38 recommendations centering on production, record content, employee training, and preparation for the new system and implementation deficiency issues, the VA has closed out only 14.

Since last July, the OIG has published five more reports highlighting concerns about medication management, workflow errors, interoperability problems, insufficient user training, and frustration among employees over the handling of problem tickets and resolution of reported problem areas. Many subcommittee members also shared their frustrations with VA and OIG witnesses during the hearing. Like previous hearings, many lawmakers and advocacy groups left with more questions and a desire to dig deeper into the issues. "It is clear this program has a long way to go," said subcommittee chair Rep. Frank Mrvan (D-IN). "The VA and Cerner must fix these problems as soon as possible. This system can't fail because at the other end are the people who put their lives at risk for their country."

The subcommittee's ranking member, Rep. Matt Rosendale (R-MT) insisted he will not support future deployments of the EHR system. He wants to see existing issues resolved and a fully functional system at the Mann-Grandstaff site before the next project launch. Cerner and the VA are poised to deploy the system to nine more VA Medical Center sites this year:

- June 11: Oregon (Roseburg, White City)
- June 25: Idaho (Boise)
- July 16: Alaska (Anchorage)
- Aug. 27: Washington (Puget Sound)
- Oct. 8: Michigan (Battle Creek, Ann Arbor, Saginaw)
- Nov. 22: Oregon (Portland)

No doubt VA's EHRM project will continue to be scrutinized in the coming months as authorizers and appropriators hold hearings and watch closely the deployment of the system throughout the year. MOAA and their Military Coalition and veteran service organization partners continue to track progress and work with the VA and Congress to keep the EHRM project moving forward and will provide future updates on this important effort. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | May 26, 2022 ++]

Military Sexual Trauma

Update 10: Servicemembers/Vets Empowerment & Support Legislation

VA's national screening program found one in three women and one in fifty men indicate they were sexually assaulted during military service. Military Sexual Trauma (MST) survivors may require specialized treatment for their conditions. Many veterans also feel re-traumatized by an impersonal and adversarial claims process.

DAV supports companion bills S. 3025 and H.R. 5666, the **Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2021**, in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 074, which urges improvement of the process for determining service connection for conditions related to MST. It would codify current policy easing some of the evidentiary requirements for veterans filing claims for service-connection for conditions related to the after-effects of a MST and allow non-military documentation and opinions of medical professionals to bolster claims. Furthermore, the bill would require VA to resolve every reasonable doubt in favor of the veteran with the reasons for granting or denying service-connection recorded in full.

Numerous reports of the VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) document VBA's struggle to adhere to its policy and correct long-standing problems in administering claims for MST survivors. Even after its most recent reform attempting to consolidate claims adjudication for PTSD due to MST at five regional offices, a recent poll of DAV service officers found 70% identified little difference in the timeliness or quality of its decisions on MST. In addition, respondents indicated that veterans' preference for sex of their examiner was not honored for 40% of claimants. S. 3025 and H.R. 5666 would address many of the problems in the claims adjudication process.

S.3025 was Introduced 20 OCT 2021 by Sen. Jon (D-MT) and on 1 MAR 2022 was placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders. Calendar No. 289. It currently only has one cosponsor. On 21 OCT 2021 it was introduced in the House as H.R.5666 by Rep. Chellie Pingree, (D-ME-1). It currently only has one cosponsor.

DAV urges VA to conduct rigorous oversight of personnel involved in developing and processing such claims and is Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2021 requesting those who share these views to contact their Congressional Representatives and urge them to support this important legislation. Towards this they have furnished the following edible letter to aid in that communication.

o-o-O-o-o-

Subj: The Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2021 to Improve the Claims Process for MST Survivors

Dear Senator/Rep _____

As your constituent, and in recognition of veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma (MST), I urge you to co-sponsor and support the enactment of S.3025/H.R.5666, bills to review practices related to VA Compensation and Pension exams for claims related to MST.

DAV supports companion bills S. 3025 and H.R. 5666 in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 074, which urges improvement of the process for determining service connection for conditions related to MST. It would codify current policy easing some of the evidentiary requirements for veterans filing claims for service-connection for conditions related to the after-effects of a MST and allow non-military documentation and opinions of medical professionals to bolster claims. Furthermore, the bill would require VA to resolve every reasonable doubt in favor of the veteran with the reasons for granting or denying service-connection recorded in full.

These bills would require an assessment of the adequacy of tools and protocols used by examiners, to include: Disability Benefits Questionnaires; the VA's schedule of rating disabilities; the necessity of pelvic exams to diagnose certain conditions linked to MST and consideration for whether certain conditions should include both a physical and mental health examination.

Numerous reports of the VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) document VBA's struggle to adhere to its policy and correct long-standing problems in administering claims for MST survivors. Even after its most recent reform attempting to consolidate claims adjudication for PTSD due to MST at five regional offices, a recent poll of DAV service officers found 70% identified little difference in the timeliness or quality of its decisions on MST. In addition, respondents indicated that veterans' preference for sex of their examiner was not honored for 40% of claimants.

S. 3025 and H.R. 5666 would address many of the problems in the claims adjudication process. Please advise me of your position on this bill, and thank you for your support of America's disabled veterans and their survivors.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Address

[Source: DAV National Commander | Andrew Marshall | May 24, 2022 ++]

VA Infrastructure

Update 03: Sweeping Changes on Hold Due To Missing Nominee

The Veterans Affairs Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission has only eight months left to finalize its report on the fate of hundreds of department hospital and clinic closures across the country, recommendations that could reshape veterans care in America for decades to come. But they haven't even started their work. The commission — designed to be an independent arbiter looking at where new VA medical centers should be built and where aging ones should be closed — was originally supposed to begin meetings and site visits in February, per legislation passed by Congress in 2018.

That can't happen until all nine members of the commission are named and confirmed, however. Eight of them — including former Pennsylvania Rep. Patrick Murphy, who will serve as chairman — were announced by the White House in early March. The delay has caused angst among lawmakers and veterans groups who fear the commission may not have enough time to go through the massive volume of market data, department operational files and site interviews needed to determine how best to deploy VA health care assets for years to come. Hanging in the balance is the potential closing of dozens of VA medical centers, the construction of dozens more, or absolutely nothing if the commission's work isn't completed in time.

On 25 MAY, VA Secretary Denis McDonough acknowledged the frustration around the panel delays, saying his department is doing what it can to prepare information for the panel once it is established. "If there's no commissioner, there's still a statute," he said. "We still have these needs, and so we'll be looking at what our options are there." In March, McDonough unveiled VA's formal recommendations to the commission, which included closing or completely reconstructing 35 major VA medical centers in 21 states and nearly \$2 trillion in infrastructure spending. The recommendations drew immediate condemnation from union officials, who voiced concerns about disruptions to patient care and staffing levels. Also unhappy were conservative advocates, who noted the review was originally conceived with the idea of closing down more sites and allowing veterans to seek more private-sector care.

The commission is expected to heavily revise McDonough's list, something the secretary said he would welcome. VA senior staff have expressed concerns that the review — mandated by Congress — was too reliant on outdated information about health care options in communities across the country, which changed dramatically due to the coronavirus pandemic. But that commission work won't start until the ninth panel member is named. The eight nominees already announced include veterans group representatives and health care experts, as well as selections from the White House, House Republican leadership, and House and Senate Democratic leaders.

Congressional officials confirmed that the missing nomination is one set aside for senior Senate Republican leaders. A source close to the process said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, (R-KY) sent his pick to the White House in March, but no public announcement has been made yet. White House officials did not respond to requests for comment on the commission. VA officials deferred questions about the nominations to the White House. Pandemic complications delayed the mandated release of McDonough's recommendations by almost two months. But the legislation that established the AIR Commission still calls for the panel's final report to be done by Jan. 31, 2023, and for the White House to approve or reject the recommendations by Feb. 15.

McDonough has repeatedly cautioned that any infrastructure decisions made by senior leaders or the commission will likely take years to implement, and that patients and staff should not

worry about any short-term changes to their facilities. “We’ll continue to communicate with the workforce and with our veterans to make sure that everybody understands precisely the decisions we’re going to make,” he said. “None of these decisions will be made behind closed doors.” For now, the commission’s review work isn’t happening behind closed doors either. Senate and VA officials said they do not have a timeline for when the final nomination may be announced. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 26, 2022 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention

Update 65: Mission Daybreak Will Pay for Ideas to Reduce Suicides

Veterans Affairs officials want to give you up to \$3 million if you can help solve the problem of veteran suicides. On 25 MAY, department leaders announced the launch of Mission Daybreak, a \$20 million “challenge” designed to help VA develop new suicide prevention strategies. The goal is to get thousands of new ideas on how to better help and support veterans over the next six weeks, and award cash prizes for the best 40 ideas in coming months. “To end veteran suicide, we need to use every tool available,” VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in a statement. “Mission Daybreak is fostering solutions across a broad spectrum of focus areas to combat this preventable problem.”

The unconventional approach is intended to build upon the existing array of VA suicide prevention initiatives and solve the largely static problem of how to keep veterans from self-harm. Veteran suicides fell to their lowest level in 12 years in 2019, down more than one death per day from the previous year’s levels, according to VA data. That was the most significant improvement in suicide metrics in five years, but it still leaves the number of veterans lost to suicide each day at about 17, despite years of legislative focus and funding to combat the issue.

Last month, VA officials announced plans to award nearly \$52 million in grants for suicide prevention programs in coming months to community groups in an effort to provide more targeted help for individuals in distress. The new Mission Daybreak initiative has similar parameters but a different approach, according to Dr. Matt Miller, national director of VA suicide prevention. “A key to innovation is rapid implementation and development,” he said. “So what we’re really trying to foster and harness is those ideas that can be rapidly developed, be scalable across our system, and make a big difference quickly.”

The first phase of the challenge — which is modeled after similar efforts in the Defense Department for a host of procurement and technology development issues — will require teams

or individuals to submit a 10-page concept paper that describes “a proposed solution, its impact on specific veteran communities, an evidence framework, [and] an implementation plan.” The proposals can focus on any facet of suicide prevention, but officials said they will be specifically considering several key areas:

- Utilizing digital data from active and passive sources;
- Improved access to and efficiency to the Veterans Crisis Line;
- Preventing firearm suicides;
- Improving community resilience and connection;
- Incorporating family and community into veteran’s well-being;
- And reducing barriers to veterans asking for help.

The top 30 ideas will each be awarded \$250,000, and 10 others \$100,000 each. The top 30 will also be invited to join an eight-week virtual accelerator program to help individuals refine the ideas, with additional cash prizes (including two first-place awards of \$3 million) to be given out in the fall. Entrants will not be required to implement the ideas, but instead will help VA officials put the changes in place and monitor their impact on veterans’ mental health and quality of life.

Miller said initial data compiled by the department shows that the rate of veteran suicides may have declined even further in 2021. But even so, he is hopeful the new challenge can inspire new ideas to push those numbers down even further. When factoring in active-duty military, reservists and other associated groups, the total of military and veteran suicide is roughly 20 per day. Many outside groups still quote the “22-a-day” statistic regarding veteran suicide, even though that is based on an outdated estimate from VA officials more than a decade ago.

Veterans experiencing a mental health emergency can contact the Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and select option 1 for a VA staffer. Veterans, troops or their family members can also text 838255 or visit VeteransCrisisLine.net for assistance.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 25, 2022 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 16 thru 31 MAY 2022

Georgia -- Kentey Ramone Fielder of Augusta was sentenced in federal court to 40 months in prison and three years of supervised release for defrauding a nonprofit group. According to a multiagency investigation, Fielder and his company, Clean Contracting Services (CCSI), fraudulently obtained a contract to perform janitorial services at the Army's Yakima Training Center, despite being disqualified from federal contracting in 2014. After obtaining the contract, Fielder posed as a government contracting official and contacted Yakima Specialties, a Yakima-based nonprofit group, and claimed that it had been awarded the contract. Yakima Specialties then performed the work but was unable to obtain payment because it did not have the real contract. Fielder then billed for and received payment for the work under CCSI. This contract was one of many that Fielder received using this fraudulent scheme. Fielder pleaded guilty to wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 17, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Massachusetts -- Drummond Neil Smithson was indicted on one count of use of interstate communications to transmit a threat to injure. On or about July 19, 2020, Smithson, an Army veteran, mailed a threatening communication from Ayer, Massachusetts, to VA threatening to injure members of Moms Demand Action, a grassroots organization advocating for the end to gun violence. The charge provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. This investigation was conducted by the VA OIG, FBI, and Federal Medical Center, Devens. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 17, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Texas -- Six Texas men were indicted on multiple charges related to a healthcare fraud scheme involving two local pharmacies and a pain clinic. The defendants include the owners of the two pharmacies, one of whom also owned the pain clinic; one doctor employed at the pain clinic; two pharmacists; and one other coconspirator whose role was to recruit and refer federal employee patients to the clinic. The defendant doctor would see these patients and prescribe them unnecessary drugs at the request of the clinic's owner, who paid him kickbacks. The charges also allege that the two pharmacist defendants would also be paid in kickbacks to fill compounded drug prescriptions. The pharmacies allegedly billed the Department of Labor Federal Employee Compensation Program, and once they received the funds, the two owners would disburse it among the coconspirators. If convicted, the defendants face up to five years in federal prison for the conspiracy and up to 10 years for the related healthcare fraud charges. The two owners were also charged with conspiracy to launder money and face another 10 years-in prison. The VA OIG, Department of Labor OIG, and US Postal Service OIG conducted the investigation, with the assistance of the FBI and Defense Criminal Investigative Service. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 20, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Florida -- Pat Truglia of Parkland was sentenced to 120 months in prison for his role in a healthcare fraud and kickback scheme. Truglia and his coconspirators defrauded healthcare benefit programs by offering, paying, soliciting, and receiving kickbacks and bribes in exchange for completed doctors' orders for durable medical equipment, namely orthotic braces. Truglia previously pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit healthcare fraud. Two codefendants, **Nicholas Defonte** and **Christopher Cirri**, both of Toms River, New Jersey, previously pleaded guilty to the same conspiracy and are awaiting sentencing. In addition to the prison term, Truglia was sentenced to three years of supervised release, restitution of close to \$34 million, and forfeiture of approximately \$9.5 million. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 20, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Missouri -- Stephon Ziegler of Weatherby Lake was sentenced in federal court to 12 months in prison without parole for falsely claiming ownership in a firm that fraudulently received hundreds of millions of dollars in government contracts set aside for service-disabled veterans and certified minorities. Ziegler, an African American service-disabled veteran, admitted that he falsely claimed to be the owner of Zieson Construction Company, a Missouri corporation whose primary business was obtaining federal construction contracts set aside for award to qualified small businesses. Zieson used Ziegler's status to compete for federal contracts designated for businesses owned by service-disabled veterans and minorities. Between 2009 and 2018, Zieson was awarded approximately 199 federal contracts for which the government paid Zieson approximately \$335 million. The VA OIG helped in this multiagency investigation. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 20, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Florida -- Patsy Truglia of Parkland was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison for his role in two consecutive conspiracies to commit healthcare fraud. According to a multiagency investigation, from January 2018 to April 2019, Truglia and his coconspirators generated medically unnecessary physicians' orders via a telemarketing operation for durable medical equipment (DME). Through the telemarketing operation, the personal and medical information of Medicare beneficiaries was harvested to create the unnecessary DME orders. The orders were then forwarded to purported "telemedicine" vendors that, in exchange for a fee, paid illegal bribes to physicians to sign the orders, often without ever contacting the beneficiaries. Truglia's telemarketing operation used the orders as support for millions of dollars in false and fraudulent claims submitted to the Medicare program. To avoid Medicare scrutiny, Truglia spread the fraudulent claims across five DME storefronts operated under his ownership and control. The

scheme led to about \$25 million in fraudulent DME claims submitted to Medicare, resulting in approximately \$12 million in payments. In April 2019, Truglia's storefronts were subject to search warrants and a civil action under which, among other ramifications, enjoined Truglia and his five storefronts from engaging in any further healthcare fraud conduct. Undeterred, Truglia and other conspirators carried out a similar conspiracy using three new DME storefronts and different "telemedicine" vendors. This second conspiracy caused approximately \$12 million in additional fraudulent DME claims to be submitted to Medicare, resulting in approximately \$6.3 million in payments. In addition to his prison sentence, Truglia was ordered to pay \$18.3 million in restitution. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 24, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Florida -- A VA OIG investigation found that **Zachary Barton**, a South Florida veteran and self-proclaimed bodybuilder, exaggerated his mental and physical impairments to increase the disability payments he received from VA. Barton admitted he lied on a mental health test by reporting to VA that he had been in combat, qualifying him for posttraumatic stress disorder benefits. He also falsely reported that he could not lift more than 10 to 20 pounds or walk without a cane. Based on these lies, VA found Barton was 100% disabled, when in fact Barton would routinely drive, walk his pet, go shopping, and perform strenuous weight-lifting with no difficulty. As a result of his misrepresentations, Barton received approximately \$245,000 in VA benefits to which he was not entitled. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 27, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Pennsylvania -- **Bruce Minor** of Philadelphia pleaded guilty in connection with his scheme to embezzle money from his former employer, the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. In April 2022, Minor was charged with theft of government funds stemming from his theft of more than \$487,000 in VA travel reimbursement funds, which he helped administer as part of his official duties as a travel clerk. To perpetrate the theft, Minor created fraudulent travel reimbursement claims in the names of at least three other VA employees and then diverted the fraudulently obtained funds into bank accounts he controlled. According to court documents, in an email to medical center management, Minor admitted to stealing approximately \$13,000 in travel funds, though a subsequent investigation showed that he stole upwards of \$487,000 between December 2015 and September 2019. The VA OIG conducted this investigation. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 27, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Louisiana -- **Sloane Signal-Debose** of Slidell, Louisiana, was charged with misappropriating funds from a veteran while she was his fiduciary. From 2016 until 2018, Signal had control over the veteran's finances and bank accounts. During that time, she took over \$100,000 from the veteran's accounts and used it as the down payment on a home in her name and used additional funds from the veteran to pay

contractors working on the home. Signal then submitted false records to VA to hide her misuse of the veteran's funds. If convicted, she faces up to five years in federal prison, three years of supervised release, and restitution. The VA OIG conducted this investigation. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 27, 2022 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Arizona -- Dennis Gene Godbolt of Buckeye was sentenced after previously pleading guilty to one count of theft of government property. While employed by the VA Phoenix Health Care System, Godbolt stole property, mostly consisting of home furnishings, that had been donated by Walmart to VA for use by homeless and destitute veterans. Godbolt typically picked up donated items from the Walmart distribution center in Buckeye, Arizona, and transported the donations in a truck belonging to Voluntary Services. On numerous occasions, instead of taking the donations to VA facilities in Phoenix, Godbolt stole the items and placed them in his personal storage lockers. He was sentenced to five years of supervised probation and ordered to pay \$95,000 in restitution to VA. The VA OIG conducted this investigation. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | May 27, 2022 ++]

VET Legislation Progress

15-31 MAY 2022

Veterans, including those who may be at increased risk for breast cancer because of their service near burn pits, could have better access to breast cancer screenings under a pair of bills that cleared Congress this week. The House on 18 MAY voted 418-0 to approve the Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas Supporting Expanded Review for Veterans in Combat Environments, or SERVICE, Act (S.2102), which would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct mammograms for all women who served near burn pits or other toxic exposures, regardless of symptoms, age or family history.

The chamber also voted 419-0 to pass the Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options, or MAMMO, for Veterans Act (S.25330), which would require the VA to craft a strategic plan to improve breast imaging services within a year, create a three-year pilot program of tele-mammography for veterans in areas where the VA does not offer in-house mammograms, and expand veterans' access to clinical trials through partnerships with the National Cancer Institute. Both bills passed the Senate unanimously in March, meaning they now only await President Joe Biden's signature before becoming law.

The Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas SERVICE Act is named after a Marine Corps veteran who died in April after being diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer at age 38. Thomas served near a burn pit in Iraq and was unaware she faced an elevated risk of breast cancer, but was advised to get a mammogram in 2018 during a routine medical exam. In written testimony last year,

Thomas told senators that she "needed that mammogram sooner." "Early detection and treatment are key in the fight against breast cancer," Sen. John Boozman, R-Ark., the lead sponsor of the bill, said in a statement when the bill passed the Senate. "Given the additional risk factors associated with toxic exposure, which we know has occurred in recent combat settings, the VA must update its policies so vulnerable veterans can receive mammograms."

Passage of the bill came the same day senators announced a bipartisan deal to greatly expand health care and benefits for veterans suffering from illnesses related to toxic exposure. While the full text of the agreement has not yet been released, the House-passed bill upon which the deal is based did not include breast cancer as one of the ailments for which benefits would automatically be extended. The two mammogram bills were among a slate of 19 veterans-related bills, including several others that also focus on issues primarily affecting female veterans, the House passed this week, its last before it goes on a two-week Memorial Day recess. Bills approved 18 MAY included four meant to improve support for survivors of military sexual trauma.

- One bill, approved 417-0, seeks to improve coordination between the Veterans Benefits Administration and Veterans Health Administration when helping veterans file claims related to sexual trauma.
- Another, passed 405-12, would add annual training on sexual trauma for members of the Board of Veterans' Appeals, which hears veterans' benefits claims after they've been denied. The opposition came entirely from Republicans.
- The House also advanced a bill in a 414-2 vote to require the VA to have the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine conduct a comprehensive review of VA medical examinations for people who submit claims for mental and physical conditions related to sexual trauma. The "no" votes came from Reps. Sean Casten, D-Ill., and Diana Harshbarger, R-Tenn.
- And the chamber passed a bill in a 420-0 vote to create a peer support program at the Veterans Benefits Administration for sexual trauma survivors.

The House also voted 420-0 on H.R.5738 to require the VA to provide lactation rooms for veteran moms in all of its medical centers. An estimated 90 VA facilities across the country already have nursing rooms, but only VA employees can access them. "The bills passed today address the unique needs of women veterans, including ensuring safe and discreet lactation spaces for veteran mothers who seek care at VA facilities and on H.R.6901 providing dignity to survivors of MST as they go through the claims process," House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mark (D-CA) said in a statement.

The MST bills and the lactation room bill still need to be voted on by the Senate before they could be signed into law by Biden. [Source: Military.com | Rebecca Kheel | 19 May 2022 ++]

SC Military Friendly Legislation

Update 01: H.3247 | Workforce Enhancement and Military Recognition Act

Veterans in South Carolina will no longer pay state income tax on military retirement benefits in excess of \$17,500. The **Workforce Enhancement and Military Recognition Act** was signed by South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster on Friday, May 13, 2022. South Carolina now joins 35 other states that provide full state tax exemptions on those benefits. Previously, Veterans received a partial tax exemption if they'd served 20 years. McMaster said in a statement, "We're doing everything we can to incentivize our nation's heroic veterans to live, work, and raise their families here in S.C. For years, we have fought to eliminate all state income taxes on their retirement pay. On Friday, I signed a bill into law that will make that a reality." "This is just one more way we can thank our veterans for their sacrifice and it adds to the long list of things that makes South Carolina the most military-friendly state in the country." [Source: www.wistv.com | Nevin Smith | May 16, 2022 ++]

Medicare-For-All

S.4204 | National Health Insurance Program Act of 2022

Sen. Bernie Sanders and 14 other senators introduced the Medicare for All Act of 2022 on 12 MAY to create a federally-administered single-payer healthcare system. Under the bill, the program would be implemented over a four-year period. In the first year, traditional Medicare would begin covering dental, vision and hearing aids for those not eligible under current law. The Medicare eligibility age would be lowered to 55 and Medicare Part A, B and D deductibles would be eliminated, as would premiums and copays. People 18 and younger would become eligible to enroll in the new program. A transition plan would also be established to address coverage gaps.

The Medicare eligibility age would be lowered to 45 in the second year and to 35 in the third year. By the fourth year, every U.S. citizen would be eligible for comprehensive benefits and would receive a Medicare card to access care. Institutional long-term care for seniors and

people with disabilities would continue as it is currently covered under Medicaid. Health benefits provided through Veterans Affairs and the Indian Health Service would also remain unchanged. Benefits would include:

- Hospital services, including inpatient and outpatient hospital care, 24-hour emergency services and inpatient prescription drugs.
- Ambulatory patient services.
- Primary and preventive services, including chronic disease management.
- Prescription drugs, medical devices and biological products.
- Mental health and substance use treatment.
- Laboratory and diagnostic services.
- Comprehensive reproductive, maternity and newborn care, including abortion.
- Pediatrics, including early and periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment.
- Dental health, audiology and vision services.
- Home- and community-based long-term services.

When the legislation was introduced, Congressional Budget Office Director Phillip Swagel testified before the Senate Budget Committee to deliver a report about the financial and medical effects of implementing a national single-payer system. The report concluded that federal subsidies for healthcare in 2030 would increase to a range of \$1.5 trillion to \$3 trillion and gross domestic product would be approximately 1 percent to 10 percent lower by 2030. You can read the full bill at <https://www.sanders.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/Medicare-for-All-2022-Bill.pdf> [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Jakob Emerson | May 17, 2022 ++]

Vet COLA 2023

H.R.7846 | Bill To Guarantee Boost for Veterans Benefits

Lawmakers in recent days took the first steps in ensuring that veterans receive a cost-of-living boost in their federal benefits later this year, introducing legislation that would guarantee the veterans' checks see the same increase as Social Security payouts. The measure was filed by

Reps. Elaine Luria (D-VA) and Troy Nehls (R-TX) late last week and by Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Jerry Moran (R-KS) on 20 MAY. In joint statements, the four called the proposal critical to bolstering veteran’s finances.

“We have a responsibility to take care of our veterans, many of whom rely on VA for financial support,” said Moran, ranking member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee. “As rampant inflation is driving up the cost of living, this legislation helps make certain that veterans are able to keep up with our changing economy and receive the benefits they have been promised.” The legislation linking the two government benefits is largely routine. Typically, lawmakers approve the annual proposal to couple VA benefits increases with Social Security benefits increases by large bipartisan margins.

But it isn’t automatic. Despite efforts by some advocates in the past, an annual cost-of-living increase in veterans benefits requires congressional action. Social Security benefits, on the other hand, are adjusted based on an automatic formula that is triggered whether lawmakers vote on it or not. Last year, as inflation pressures began to impact the American economy, that increase was 5.9%. Officials have not said what this year’s adjustment may be, but continued rising costs across the economy could drive that figure even higher. The VA COLA increase legislation would apply to payouts for disability compensation, clothing allowance, dependency and indemnity benefits, and other VA assistance programs.

“Transitioning from active duty to civilian life is not always easy, and a cost-of-living adjustment is the least we can do for the men, women, and families who served our country,” said Luria, herself a Navy veteran. Tester, who serves as chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, said the bill will “ensure [veterans] benefits are keeping pace with the changing economy.” No timetable has been set for when either chamber could vote on the proposal. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 23, 2022 ++]

VA COLA 2023

S.4223 | Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2022

Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) and Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS) have introduced the **Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) Act of 2022** to increase the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and military survivors under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Chairman Tester said, “When it comes to our nation’s veterans and their families, we’ve got to see to it that they don’t fall back on hard times. Our bipartisan bill will ensure their benefits are keeping pace with the changing economy—providing these folks with the support they need and earned.” Ranking Member Moran said, “We have a responsibility to take care of our veterans, many of whom rely on VA for financial support. As rampant inflation is driving up the cost of living, this legislation helps makes certain veterans are able to keep up with our changing economy and receive the benefits they have been promised.”

The Senators’ bill would increase certain VA benefits including disability and dependent compensation, clothing allowances, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children to reflect increases in the cost of living. The cost of living adjustment will be determined by the annual COLA adjustment to social security benefits, as determined by the Social Security Administration, and would go into effect Dec. 1, 2022. The Social Security Administration bases their annual COLA adjustment on the Consumer Price Index, as determined each December by the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Text of the Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2022 can be found at <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/services/files/EE9F4477-D38C-4029-8959-E7E50553CFE7> . [Source: TREA | Bill Dudley | May 23, 2022 ++]

Congressional Resources

Member’s Contact Info & Vet Bill Status

If in doubt as to your legislator’s online contact info or who they are, the below websites provide ALL legislator’s names with contact info to facilitate the copying and forwarding of suggested letters to them, asking them questions, or seeking their assistance:

- <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%7D> – **House**
- <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%2C%22chamber%22%3A%22Senate%22%7D> – **Senate**

To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 117th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole. To read the text of bills that are to be considered on the House floor in the upcoming week refer to <https://docs.house.gov/floor>. Note that anyone can sign up and use

MOAA's Legislative Action Center at <https://moaa.quorum.us/issueareas>. You do not have to be a member.

Military Retention

Update 01: Junior Service Members Being Hit Hard By Inflation

Inflation and supply chain concerns are having an impact on service members and their families, just as they're affecting other families nationwide, but "our junior service members ... feel the largest impact," the top enlisted Marine told lawmakers 18 MAY. "If we can't get a handle on those costs that are [burdening our] families, then that's going to impact our retention," said Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Troy E. Black, during a hearing of the House Appropriations military construction subcommittee.

Rep. David Valadao (R-CA) asked whether there are additional flexibilities or resources that the services may need to ensure that military families' basic needs are met. "Some of my constituents have expressed concerns about rising food and supply costs in the commissaries," Valadao said. Black responded that inflation is affecting everything from food at commissaries and grocery stores outside the gate to child care. He also expressed concern that Basic Allowance for Housing rates may lag behind increased housing costs in local markets. "Obviously, those two things don't align. Those are impacts to our families," he said.

Last year, in response to skyrocketing housing costs, defense officials took the highly unusual step of providing a temporary increase in BAH for service members in 56 hard-hit housing areas around the country. The rates were offered for the last three months of the year, until the new, annually adjusted rates took effect in January. Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith said he echoed the issues raised by Black, and added, "I can't overstate how important the commissaries are to our folks. That does put affordable food in front of them. It gives them the opportunity to purchase it."

In response to earlier questions about how the nationwide shortage of baby formula is affecting military families, Black said the current shortage highlights the ongoing challenges with the supply chain. He noted service members stationed in Okinawa and Guam are "at the end of the supply chain. There's less and less opportunity for families to have what they need," he said. "There are challenges and things we need to get after, and this current challenge with the baby formula is just one of those," Black said.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, chairwoman of the full House Appropriations Committee, said lawmakers will seek more information about the baby formula supply for military families. "We need to work together with you as to how we're providing for our service men and women," she

said. "I'm sure they're frantic about being able to get a product so they can feed their babies. We'd really like to know what the situation is with the military, and then work with you as to how we can address it so that becomes part of the answer to this very serious crisis. "Families shouldn't have to choose between supply and safety," she said. "We want to make sure that when we're talking about families, we're including our military families, as well." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 18, 2022 ++]

Navy Climate Plan

Mostly Silent on Its Biggest Polluters: Ships and Planes

The Navy has unveiled a plan to cut its energy emissions in half by the end of this decade and reach so-called "net-zero" status by 2050. Yet for all of the plan's bold ideas and innovations, there's one aspect that remains conspicuously unaddressed -- the scores of ships and planes that burn fuel anytime they operate. Instead, the plan released this week focuses on increased vehicle fuel efficiency and setting up new energy systems such as microgrids to become less dependent on fossil fuels and harden the Navy against the growing effects of climate change, which is increasingly threatening coastal bases with flooding and extreme weather.

The Navy plan is the latest move by the military to underscore its commitment to tackling climate change under President Joe Biden, who has put the issue front and center after it was largely pushed aside by the previous Republican administration. "For the Department of Navy, this is existential," Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro wrote in the opening lines of the strategy document. "If we do not act, as sea levels rise, bases like Norfolk Naval Base and Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island will be severely tested in their ability to support their missions."

As part of the new strategy, the Department of the Navy will aim to make its ground vehicles, including large trucks such as the Marine Corps' seven-ton Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement, more fuel efficient. The Navy's ambitious overall goal is to be buying "100% zero-emission vehicles by 2035, including 100% zero-emission light-duty vehicle acquisitions by 2027," according to the strategy publicly released by the service. It also plans to install more microgrids -- small-scale power systems -- on installations. The independent systems are seen as a way to provide renewable power to bases and also shield from disruptions to the broader electrical grid.

On 24 MAY, the Marine Corps announced that one of its logistics bases in Albany, Georgia, became the first net-zero installation in the Department of Defense. That means the base is generating more energy than it consumes "by implementing a range of climate friendly solutions," Del Toro said in the announcement. However, the Navy strategy is notably silent on what it plans to do about the ships and planes that are its largest consumers of fossil fuels and biggest emitters of climate change-driving pollution. Data from the Department of Defense showed that the Navy and Marine Corps accounted for 30% of all energy used for operations by the military in 2014. Sea and air assets made up almost equal portions of that figure.

The top consumer that year was the Air Force, with 57% of all military energy usage -- and almost entirely on air operations. During this time, the military was heavily involved in fighting the Islamic State group in Iraq and began the drawdown of troops from Afghanistan. "In fiscal year 2014, DoD consumed 87.4 million barrels of fuel enterprise-wide to deploy and sustain worldwide missions," the 2016 report explained, before adding that while much of it "can be attributed to operational tempo in U.S. Central Command, the Department's weapons platforms and equipment also are demanding more energy, albeit with ever increasing combat capability." Despite the huge consumption, a 2019 study by Brown University found that the military's overall greenhouse gas emissions have actually declined since 1975, when they were at around 110 million metric tons per year, to just under 60 million metric tons in 2018.

The new strategy does say that the Navy "will continue to explore hybrid and advanced propulsion options for all ships including future frigates and destroyers, and other classes of ships," without going into more detail. This would not be the Navy's first foray into making its ships more environmentally friendly. The Obama administration and former Navy Secretary Ray Mabus attempted to transition ships and planes to biofuels, an alternative to fossil fuels that could reduce the impacts to climate change. Also driven partly by rising fuel prices, a 2011 Department of Energy announcement said that "by 2016, the Navy plans to deploy a Great Green Fleet powered entirely by alternative fuels." Later Navy materials scaled back on that promise. By 2016, the plan was as much about energy conservation measures like hull efficiency modifications as it was biofuels.

On 23 MAY, speaking to reporters in advance of the strategy's rollout, Meredith Berger, the assistant secretary of the Navy for environment, installations and energy, said that the service is still "working with industry to understand what other types of low-emission fuel alternatives are out there" and could be used. "The driving element is always making sure that the Navy and Marine Corps meet mission," Berger said. Now, the conversation about making warships green is being framed as something to strive for, just not right now. "We see a lot of potential, and future ships are contemplating more of these energy-efficient drives," Berger said.

Despite its vagueness about ships and planes, the strategy is a statement on the Navy's belief that climate change is a serious threat to the service. Berger said that San Diego, home to

several major naval bases and a Marine Corps boot camp, is being "highly impacted." She added that Norfolk, home to the Navy's largest naval base, has been seeing more flooding. "If temperatures continue to rise, the oceans will get warmer, creating more destructive storms requiring our fleets and Marine Corps forces to increase their operational tempo to respond," Del Toro wrote in the strategy memo.

"Bold climate action is a mission imperative" for the Navy, and "in this decisive decade, we have no other alternative," according to Del Toro. [Source: Military.com | Konstantin Toropin | May 25, 2022 ++]

NAS Key West

Junior Sailors Scrambling for a Place to Live

Junior sailors stationed at Naval Air Station Key West, Florida, are struggling to find homes after the closure of two of the base's barracks sent about 60 service members looking for alternative places to stay. It's an incredibly expensive housing market, including nearly \$4,000-a-month trailers the Navy had built to market for "leisure travel." In an email to Military.com, base spokeswoman Danette Baso Silvers said that the base decided to shutter the housing for single, junior sailors "to conduct much needed repairs and renovations." According to the base website, the pair of buildings could house about 100 sailors.

The Navy says that those sailors have a variety of options, but two who spoke with Military.com echoed a spate of social media posts from troops at the base saying that the alternatives are prohibitively expensive or otherwise not workable. Chief among those options are newly created "vacation rental units" -- two-bedroom mobile homes intended for the base's Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) team to rent to vacationers.

According to flyers distributed to sailors in early May that were reviewed by Military.com, sailors would be charged \$127 a day, or between \$3,810 and \$3,937 a month, to stay in the two-bedroom vacation rentals. That is the same rate that the MWR charges eligible vacationers but, split between two service members, the rent is within monthly housing allowances for single junior sailors. The base has 36 such trailers available. A flyer sent out last week informed barracks residents that the rate for the trailers would increase to \$142 per day in October. One sailor who spoke with Military.com called the option "ridiculous," considering the price was for a trailer.

To start, an E-1 to E-4 sailor with no dependents receives a housing allowance of \$2,364 for Key West. However, several websites show that the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment on the island begins at around \$3,000. One sailor who spoke with Military.com and has been impacted by move-out explained that, even if you're willing to pay the difference, finding an available unit is a challenge. Military.com is not disclosing the identities of sailors affected by the closing of the barracks who were interviewed for this article due to their concerns about retaliation from Navy leadership. Many rentals also require first and last month's rent and a security deposit up front -- a prohibitive sum of money for a young sailor.

The next option -- privatized base housing -- is also a nonstarter for young, single sailors. According to one sailor, the wait-list for privatized housing stands at more than 130 single sailors. The other sailor said they were part of a group of three sailors who applied to be roommates and were told they would be waiting four to six months. "Since we're all single sailors, if a married family with kids comes, we get pushed back, and pushed back, and pushed back," that sailor added. When asked about the wait, Silvers said that the current wait-list for privatized housing "can be up to four months. This is why the vacation rentals are an option in the interim," she added.

Silvers said that the command is "working directly with the Sailors living in the affected barracks to assist in finding them locations to live" and that closing the barracks was necessary for improvements to housing. "These \$11 million renovations will include updates to the HVAC system, fire alarms system, and other renovations and facility improvements," Silvers said. Of the 60 sailors impacted by the barracks closure, only 19 have yet to find alternative housing, she added. One sailor told Military.com that two of their fellow sailors "found something on Craigslist where they're living with eight other people in a house."

Both sailors who spoke with Military.com also noted that the plan seems to fail to take into account service members who are reporting to the command and need a place to stay while they arrange a permanent living situation. "My biggest worry is people coming from A school or right out of boot camp who have no savings, and they're told to find a place in 10 days -- which is impossible to do," one sailor said. The military typically pays for 10 days of lodging for service members changing duty stations.

One sailor who spoke with Military.com explained that they knew a service member who resorted to sleeping in a tent to cover the gap, while another was forced to send his wife and child back to their home state while they slept on a fellow sailor's couch. "The way this base is run, I feel like it's more focused towards the betterment of retirees going on vacation and the pilots being on vacation while they're training and not really towards the people who are working here," one sailor said.

The issues with the barracks in Key West are just the latest in a string of recent events in which the Navy has struggled with the basic housing needs of its sailors.

- In February, a Navy Times investigation revealed that the service has known about infrastructure issues plaguing the barracks at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, for years -- including a lack of hot water -- but been unable to address them. Hundreds of junior military members were moved out of the affected buildings the Monday after the Navy Times report was published.
- More recently, Military.com reported that the Navy didn't disclose a string of suicides aboard the aircraft carrier George Washington. One of the key issues that plagued junior sailors was being forced to move onto a ship that was an active construction zone, complete with constant noise from power tools and outages to services like electricity and hot water.
- Shortly after that reporting, and a speech from a senior leader stating that the Navy could do little to help, the GW's commander told the crew that anyone living aboard would be allowed to move off-ship.

When Military.com asked Silvers why the Navy Gateway Inn & Suites or the Navy Lodge -- hotels run by the Navy's own Exchange Command -- were not considered as a fix in Key West, like they were in the case of Bethesda and the George Washington, she said it was because "they are not long-term solutions. It was determined that providing these Sailors [Basic Allowance for Housing] and the option to live out in town or elsewhere on base was the best option for long-term renovations," she added.

When asked about the vacation trailers, Silvers said that "if the Sailor chooses to stay in vacation rentals until the end of their tour that is a long-term option." When asked about the disparity between the housing allowance and actual rent prices, Silvers said that leadership "understand the price of housing off base, which is why we have offered the rental units and the [privatized base] housing to these Sailors."

In the meantime, the sailors at Key West say their concerns have fallen on deaf ears. A note posted by a Key West sailor to social media said that "my chief just shrugged at me and told me that's how it is, my [Command Master Chief] laughed at me at all hands when I asked about it, and the civilian department heads tell me their hands are tied." One of the sailors who spoke with Military.com said the consensus they got from leadership is "we've given you [a housing allowance], you figure it out." [Source: Military.com | Konstantin Toropin | May 13, 2022 ++]

Military Sexual Misconduct

Update 03: Officer Court Marshalled for Motorboating Subordinate

A former Louisiana National Guard officer was allowed to retire after a general court-martial convicted him of charges stemming from “motorboating” a subordinate soldier during an informal promotion ceremony while deployed to Jordan in May 2021, Army Times has confirmed. Capt. **Billy Joe Crosby Jr.**, a logistics officer who was overseas with the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team during its recent deployment, was initially charged with abusive sexual contact and conduct unbecoming an officer, according to court records obtained by Army Times. Crosby was the officer-in-charge of an outpost in Jordan.

Maj. Jessica Rovero, a spokesperson for the command overseeing the trial, told Army Times in a statement that Crosby’s “behavior is not in line with the Army values.” Rovero added that “multiple Soldiers immediately reported the behavior, and Crosby pled guilty at trial.” The guilty plea came with strings attached, though. The officer struck a deal that erased the abusive sexual contact charge. He pled guilty to assault consummated by battery — a non-sexual offense — and conduct unbecoming, records reveal. Crosby, a prior enlisted soldier who participated in the 1989 invasion of Panama, was confined for 30 days. The plea deal also prevented the judge from dismissing him from the Army, which would have kept him from collecting his retirement.

A Louisiana National Guard spokesperson, Lt. Col. Noel Collins, confirmed that Crosby retired March 31 after completing his confinement and returning home. Crosby did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

What did Crosby do?

When he learned that the junior soldier was selected for promotion, Crosby reportedly announced to her twice that he intended to “motorboat” her during her promotion ceremony because the Army Combat Uniform’s chest-placed rank patch was intended for such actions. An NCO witnessed both statements, according to a motion filed by prosecutors. Prosecutors described “motorboating” as “when a person places his or her face between a [woman]’s breasts and shakes his or her head back and forth while making sounds resembling a boat motor.”

Weeks before the assault, Crosby also told the NCO that he wanted to bring the junior soldier with him on a driving trip to another base in Jordan. The NCO told investigators that Crosby requested the soldier’s company because “he liked looking at her tits.” The junior soldier told Crosby the day before the assault that she did not want a promotion ceremony. But during work the following day, according to a prosecution motion, Crosby “approached [the junior soldier], told her to stand up, placed the rank in front of her chest, leaned in the grab the rank with his

teeth...then placed his face between [the junior soldier]'s breasts...[and] vigorously moved his head from side to side between [her] breasts while still holding the rank with his teeth.”

It's not clear when the crime was reported, nor is it clear who reported it, but court documents indicate that agents from the Army's Criminal Investigation Division were interviewing witnesses within two weeks of the incident. Crosby, who initially declared he would plead not guilty, changed his plea after negotiating a deal that reduced the charges and protected his retirement. The removal of the abusive sexual contact charge, which was dismissed as part of the deal, also meant that he did not have to register as a sex offender. Although the deal took away the possibility of an other-than-honorable discharge and reduced his maximum confinement to 120 days, the judge only sentenced Crosby to 30 days and did not direct a reprimand, fines or forfeitures. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Davis Winkie | May 18, 2022 ++]

Army Discrimination Policy

Soldiers Facing State Law Discrimination Could Request Transfers under Draft

The Army is circulating a draft policy tweak that would specify that soldiers can request to move if they feel state or local laws discriminate against them based on gender, sex, religion, race or pregnancy, according to two sources with direct knowledge of the plans. The guidance, which would update a vague service policy to add specific language on discrimination, is far from final and would need approval from Army Secretary Christine Wormuth. But if enacted, it could be one of the most progressive policies for the force amid a growing wave of local anti-LGBTQ and restrictive contraception laws in conservative-leaning states, where the Army does most of its business.

The policy would ostensibly sanction soldiers to declare that certain states are too racist, too homophobic, too sexist or otherwise discriminatory to be able to live there safely and comfortably. "Some states are becoming untenable to live in; there's a rise in hate crimes and rise in LGBT discrimination," Lindsay Church, executive director of Minority Veterans of America, an advocacy group, told Military.com. "In order to serve this country, people need to be able to do their job and know their families are safe. All of these states get billions for bases but barely tolerate a lot of the service members."

If finalized, the new rules would clarify what situations would entitle a soldier to a so-called compassionate reassignment. Right now, those rules are vague but are mostly used for soldiers going through family problems that cannot be solved through "leave, correspondence, power of attorney, or help of family members or other parties," according to Army regulations. The

updated guidance, which sources said was drafted in response to several state laws but before a draft of a potential Supreme Court decision that would overturn *Roe v. Wade* was leaked, would instruct commanders that they can use compassionate reassignment specifically to remove troops facing discrimination from their duty stations.

The tweak came from a MILPER message, which is an internal tool for Army leaders and planners to issue policy clarifications, though the guidance has not yet been fully worked out through the policy planning process or briefed to senior leaders, according to one Army source. "The Army does not comment on leaked, draft documents," Angel Tomko, a service spokesperson, told *Military.com* in an emailed statement. "AR 600-100 and 600-200 establish the criteria for which soldiers may request for a compassionate reassignment. The chain of command is responsible for ensuring Soldiers and Families' needs are supported and maintain a high quality of life."

According to a 2015 study from Rand Corp., roughly 6% of the military is gay or bisexual and 1% is transgender or nonbinary. Those numbers are likely low, given that the survey was conducted only four years after the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and before transgender troops could serve openly. Gen Z troops, the latest generation starting to fill the ranks, are also much more likely to identify as LGBTQ. It's unclear whether the Army's inclusion of pregnancy on the list would protect reproductive care for soldiers if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned. That language could be intended to protect pregnant service members or their families from employment or other discrimination, but could also be a means for some to argue for transfers based on broader reproductive rights.

The sources who reviewed drafts of the potential policy had different interpretations of what the change would mean. In practice, however, reassignment to a new installation wouldn't happen overnight, and it would be almost impossible for a woman to find out she's pregnant, have her command approve a transfer, complete the move and then be able to seek different reproductive care during a pregnancy. Last week, Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston, the service's top enlisted leader, told lawmakers that the force is considering some response to the end of *Roe v. Wade*, though it's unclear whether that is a separate policy being mulled by Army planners.

"The answer is yes, we are drafting policies to ensure we take care of our soldiers in an appropriate way," Grinston told a House Appropriations Committee subpanel. "There are drafts if it were to be overturned, but that would be a decision for the secretary of the Army to decide the policy." However, the policy tweak shared with *Military.com* was written in April, weeks before news broke of a draft decision overturning the landmark abortion ruling, according to an Army official with direct knowledge of the situation.

At least 13 states have so-called trigger laws that will immediately outlaw abortion if and when *Roe v. Wade* is overturned. Additional GOP-controlled states are expected to follow suit with similar legislation. Meanwhile, some state lawmakers are considering restricting contraception such as IUDs and Plan B. Some officials, like Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves, haven't ruled out an outright ban on contraception. Idaho State Sen. Brent Crane, who is the state's vice majority leader, said he would be open to legislation banning some birth control methods.

Currently, Tricare, which covers 9.6 million troops and veterans, covers IUDs, contraceptive diaphragms, prescription contraceptives and surgical sterilization, which could all be severely curtailed if states go forward with banning or limiting birth control as many service members and their families receive medical care paid for by Tricare off base. The Army's consideration of a policy to protect soldiers from discriminatory laws is part of a wider Defense Department campaign to start shielding service members from increasingly divisive laws and rhetoric from state-level lawmakers. Multiple Defense Department and veterans advocate sources have told *Military.com* the other services are considering similar policies, but it is unclear how far those discussions have advanced.

The closest to a direct challenge from a service to the rise of potentially discriminatory policies coming out of state legislatures occurred in April, when the Air and Space Force vowed to provide medical and legal resources to troops who are impacted by laws "being proposed and passed in states across America that may affect LGBTQ Airmen, Guardians, and/or their LGBTQ dependents in different ways," according to a press release from those services. Texas has the highest population of soldiers in the nation, serving as the home to the Army's largest installation, Fort Hood. It is also the home of Fort Bliss, in addition to having the nation's second-largest National Guard force. The Army also has major bases in Georgia and North Carolina, as well as a constellation of other smaller bases in conservative southern states including Florida.

Some Republicans have latched onto the culture wars in hopes that new actions will fire up their base ahead of the midterms and the next presidential election. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is largely seen as a GOP front-runner in the event Donald Trump doesn't run for the White House again, signed what critics have dubbed the "Don't Say Gay Bill." That policy forbids teachers from referencing sexual orientation or gender identity to students between kindergarten and third grade. Gay teachers fear that means even mentioning their spouses could get them fired or land them in the midst of an ugly political fight in school board meetings that have become a staple of right wing media.

In April, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp signed into a law a sweeping measure to prevent transgender kids from playing on sports teams aligning with their gender identity and limiting schools from teaching about race. Kemp also signed a policy that bans books deemed offensive

from school libraries and gives parents tools to file complaints. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has called on the public to report parents of transgender kids to child protective services if those children are receiving any gender-affirming care.

"What we're seeing across the board is a small group of elected officials who are trying to politicize and weaponize LGBTQ identities in despicable ways. They're not only doing that to our youth, but the collateral damage is hurting our service members," Jacob Thomas, communications director for Common Defense, a progressive advocacy organization, told Military.com. "[Troops] can't be forced to live in places where they aren't seen as fully human. [Source: Military.com | Steve Beynon | May 19, 2022 ++]

ROK's Army

Former South Korean Defense Official Claims Training 'Very, Very Bad'

In a stark critique of the 420,000-strong South Korean army, the former deputy commander of South Korea's First Army described the "conditions for training are very, very bad," driven by high turnover of troops every year and the lack of live fire training. In-Bum Chun, former deputy commander of South Korea's First Army, said after his panel on "Deterring Aggression through Joint and Coalition Readiness" that he believes it will take five years to make a significant improvement in the readiness of Republic of Korea troops.

A key, he believes, will be creation of a senior NCO corps — experienced soldiers who can help because of their deep experience — that can speak truth to power to officers. The current Confucian culture makes this difficult with its emphasis on respect for hierarchy, but that, he said hopefully, is beginning to wear thin. Chun, who retired in July 2016, offered a few metrics to illustrate the problem, citing 60% turnover of troops every year because of Korea's conscript force system. He also said he knew of many troops who had not experienced live fire training for a decade. "So, we just can't manage the kind of level of training that we used to be amazed that others require," he said during the panel. Many commanders consider live fire training crucial to prepare troops for the reality of combat.

He appealed for help from the United States to help build the NCO corps and to rectify the training situation. Another panelist, a Korean expert with the Center for New American Security, pointed to the Trump administration's decision to eliminate many military exercises, saying that "US-South Korea joint military readiness has severely deteriorated over the past five years." Duyeon Kim, the CNAS expert based in Seoul, also pointed to the recently defeated "South Korean progressive administration" as a cause of lower readiness.

At the end of the panel the US commander of the Eighth Army in Korea, Lt. Gen. Bill Burleson, made a point of stating categorically that the forces facing North Korea are ready to fight. “They’re flying reconnaissance aircraft as we speak. They are Patriot crew members. They are artillery batteries and missile batteries that are standing ready to respond within minutes. There’s a network that’s in place. They are an armored Brigade Combat Team. There are all the frontline ROK corps with young men and women standing looking into North Korea. And despite the challenges that you’ve heard described,” Burleson said, “they’re ready”.

It’s worth noting that Chun praised Burleson “as a godsend because he truly tries to understand the Koreans.” The bad news is that Chun said he finds only “one in 10” American officers do that. [Source: Breaking Defense | Colin Clark | May 19, 2022 ++]

USMC Parris Island

Update 02: Legendary Training Depot Will Be Underwater by 2050

The Marine Corps is preparing for an enemy it can’t stop, but is ready to fight: rising sea levels. The Corps and the Department of Defense are working to create a resiliency plan before climate change puts one of the oldest Marine Corps bases underwater in the next few decades. That’s the very real risk for the Marine Corps Recruit Depot on Parris Island in South Carolina. The base is one of the main training installations for new recruits, and it is already prone to partial flooding from storms. As sea levels rise and coastlines erode, that is expected to get worse, per reviews, with multiple floods expected each year by 2050. Three quarters of the island could be underwater daily by the end of the century, according to a new report from the Associated Press.

A draft military installation resiliency review published in April outlined threats to the base and nearby Lowcountry communities. It also laid out potential mitigation efforts to adapt to the risk of storms and flooding. It recommended taking steps now to reduce shoreline erosion, protect the bridge linking the island and base to the mainland and updating infrastructure to prevent storm water and runoff from impacting drinkable water supplies. Heavy damage from worsening storms and climate change are not a hypothetical. Floods and sea level rise have significantly damaged the Atlantic seaboard, both in hurricane season and out of it. The base on Parris Island has already had to evacuate due to being in the path of hurricanes in recent years.

The base is one of the oldest Marine Corps installations. Marines first were stationed there in the 1890s, but became a recruit training depot in 1915. The Marine Corps Recruit Depot on

Parris Island isn't alone in being at risk – more than 1,700 bases worldwide could be impacted by rising sea levels – but the extremely low lying nature of Parris Island presents a unique vulnerability. Parris Island itself is heavily composed of salt marshes and the highest point is barely more than a dozen feet above sea level. That already makes the base at risk of flooding, and with sea levels rising, that risk only increases.

Other bases have seen billions of dollars in damage from hurricanes. In October 2018, Hurricane Michael directly hit Tyndall Air Base in Florida. It heavily damaged base structure and rendered 17 of the 55 F-22 Raptor fighter planes out of commission. The Pentagon put the damage at \$4.7 billion. The Department of Defense' own Climate Adaptation Plan, published last September, noted that damage from these types of severe weather events cost tens of billions of dollars annually and impact the military's capabilities.

So what happens if sea levels keep rising to unsafe levels for the Marine Corps Recruit Depot? Since that is seemingly inevitable, the Pentagon is exploring different types of mitigation measures to keep the base on Parris Island open. Some are smaller ones, such as updating culverts to handle rainwater, not building on the marshlands and other drainage improvements. Larger efforts could include building a seawall around the base. Although it's not the current strategy, relocating the base is not off the table.

Beyond the physical barriers recommended for the base, it needs to take other measures will need to be taken to address the impacts of the changing climate. The Associated Press cited the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch in pointing out that more than 500 people suffered from heat-related illnesses in the period between 2016 and 2020. That is likely to continue to be a threat, as are the impacts of worsening humidity and temperatures which could potentially limit the training that could be done on the base. [Source: Task & Purpose | Nicholas Slayton | May 22, 2022 ++]

Army Artillery

Update 03: Dream of Artillery That Fires 1,000 Miles Is Officially a Dud

The Army has decided to cancel the research effort for the Strategic Long-Range Cannon program, which would have theoretically used a rocket-boosted artillery shell capable of traveling 1,000 nautical miles. After Congress cut funding for the project, “the Secretary of the Army decided to terminate the [SLRC] project this year,” Army spokesperson Ellen Lovett told Defense News on 20 MAY. As Popular Mechanics wrote in 2020, “the 1,000-mile range of SLRC opens up some intriguing uses: from southern Germany, the Army could land shells on the

outskirts of Moscow. From the Philippines, the Army could pound China's artificial islands—and the missile sites and airfields on them—to pieces. From Japan, SLRC could hit Beijing itself.” **USAF Academy**

Grads May Have To Repay Tuition after Refusing Covid Vaccine

Three Air Force Academy cadets may very well have sacrificed their military careers and may have to repay the U.S. government for their education after refusing to get vaccinated for the novel coronavirus (Covid-19). While the cadets received bachelor's degrees when they graduated from the Air Force Academy on 25 MAY, they will not be commissioned as long as they remain unvaccinated, as first reported. Lolita Baldor of the Associated Press. “A decision to reimburse the United States for education costs in lieu of service will be made by the Secretary of the Air Force,” the Air Force Academy announced in a 21 MAY news release.

While the cost of an Air Force Academy education varies for each cadet, the total cost of tuition can run between \$160,000 to \$200,000, depending on overseas travel, advanced training experiences, and other factors. “There's a formal paperwork process that is followed before the Secretary will make a determination on whether or not to recoup the cost when a cadet does not commission,” an Air Force official told Task & Purpose. “That process is still pending.”

A fourth cadet had initially refused to be vaccinated for Covid-19, but he changed his mind and will be commissioned along with the rest of his graduating class, said Air Force Academy spokesman Dean Miller. Located in Colorado Springs, the Air Force Academy is one of the three service academies where students receive a college education paid for by the U.S. government and then accept a commission to serve as an officer in their respective branch.

“Cadets are eligible to commission once they receive their first dose and commit to completing the series. Determining what events a cadet may be able to participate in on Graduation Day depends on when the Superintendent is notified that a cadet took their first dose and committed to the full series. Considering that the Class of 2022 held their practice over the weekend, there may be logistical challenges as the ceremony nears. A discharge decision will not happen prior to Aug 1, 2022.”

Covid-19 vaccines were initially voluntary for U.S. troops because the available vaccines had been approved for emergency use only. The Pentagon required all service members to get vaccinated in August 2021, after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted full approval to the Pfizer vaccine. The FDA fully approved a second vaccine made by Moderna in January. Since the Covid-19 vaccine has become mandatory, troops who refuse to get vaccinated and do not have an approved religious, administrative, or medical exemption risk being kicked out of the service.

Enlisted airmen are subject to the same Covid-19 vaccine mandate as Air Force Academy Cadets and officers. Since October 2021, all Air Force trainees have been briefed on the consequences for refusing to get vaccinated for Covid-19 and they have also been obligated to sign a memorandum stating they understand that they will be required to take the Covid-19 vaccine and other inoculations when they join the service, Air Force spokeswoman Rose Riley told Task & Purpose. “If they refused the Covid-19 vaccine, their squadron commander issued a written order stating they must receive the vaccination,” Riley said. “If they refused a second time, meaning they had now disobeyed an order twice, they were processed for an entry level separation.”

Depending on where they are stationed in the world, U.S. service members can be required to take up to nearly 20 vaccinations. But the Defense Department’s Covid-19 vaccine mandate has spawned a tidal wave of disinformation as well as a fierce debate about service members’ religious and political freedoms. All the military branches have encountered resistance from service members — including Navy SEALs — with varying reasons for why they oppose getting vaccinated for Covid-19.

As of MAY, the Department of the Air Force has separated 399 service members for not getting vaccinated for Covid-19, according to the service’s website. Thousands more have seen their requests for religious accommodations be denied, leaving them with limited options—get the shot, appeal to the Air Force surgeon general, or start the separation/retirement process. If their appeal is denied by the surgeon general, as more than 2,700 already have been, the service members have five days to start the vaccination process or face separation. The Air Force has approved just 66 requests for religious exemptions from getting vaccinated. Another 6,003 religious exemption requests have been denied, and 2,358 requests are pending.

The overwhelming majority of Airmen and Guardians, however, have gotten vaccinated—some 98.6 percent of those on Active duty. Joining their ranks May 25 will be 937 Cadets commissioning as well as graduating—843 into the Air Force and 94 into the Space Force. Of those 843:

- 417 are scheduled to attend pilot training.
- 11 are scheduled for combat systems operator training.
- 9 are scheduled for air battle manager training.
- 24 are scheduled to be remotely piloted aircraft officers.
- 382 will be in nonrated career fields.

Also included in the graduating class were 16 international Cadets—appointees from foreign countries that have spent four years at USAFA. [Source: Task & Purpose/Air Force Magazine | Jeff Schogol / Greg Hadley | May 23 & 25, 2022 ++]

The feasibility of that — the actual how of an artillery shell traveling that distance — has always remained a bit murky. A couple of images released in 2020 from an unknown Army Futures Command event showed the proposed weapon looking like a World War II-era railway gun or the infamous “Atomic Annie” designed to fire nuclear warheads. While the Army was consistently tight-lipped about just how an artillery shell would travel 1,000 miles, there was speculation that the system would use something similar to the 155mm rocket-assisted projectile currently used by the service, which gets a boost in range after being fired through a standard artillery barrel. Another possibility was a ramjet shell using “air-breathing engines that use the projectile’s forward motion to shovel air into an intake and then into a combustion chamber, providing a lot of oxygen for fuel and propelling the projectile along at speeds from Mach 3 to Mach 6.”

The program was first put on hold last year as the Army awaited the findings of a report from the National Academy of Sciences on the cannon’s technical feasibility. The results of that study have yet to be made public, though. The Army currently has four other long-range fires programs expected to reach operational Army units by 2023.

- There’s the Extended Range Cannon Artillery, which mounts a 58-caliber, 30-foot gun tube on a M109A7 Paladin chassis and nailed a target from 43 miles away in 2020.
- There is also the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon, which has a reported range of 1,725 miles and is being fielded in fiscal year 2023.
- The Army is also planning on fielding its first mid-range anti-ship missile battery by September, 2023.
- There is the Precision Strike Missile, which has demonstrated a range over 499 kilometers.

In the meantime, though, artillerymen will have to settle for intracontinental fires only.
[Source: Task & Purpose | Max Hauptman | May 25, 2022 ++]

Navy LCS Program

Update 09: LCS Montgomery Conducts First Land-Attack Missile Exercise

The littoral combat ship Montgomery launched three AGM-114L Longbow Hellfire missiles at a land-based target this month — becoming the first LCS to do so. While cruising in the Pacific Ocean the ship successfully struck the target several nautical miles away May 12 during a proof-of-concept exercise under the vessel’s surface-to-surface mission module, the Navy said. “This test proved the critical next step in increasing lethality of the Littoral Combat Ship,” Cmdr. Dustin Lonero, Montgomery’s commanding officer, said in a Navy news release. “Using our speed and shallow draft, we are now uniquely optimized to bring this level of firepower extremely close to shore in support of our warfighters and operators on the beach..

The ship worked with an MQ-8C Fire Scout unmanned helicopter for advanced targeting and bomb-hit assessment capability to take down the land-based target, the Navy said. “The new ability for LCS to conduct maritime strikes bolsters the ship’s role in conducting shaping operations within amphibious and expeditionary warfare areas,” said Lt. Michael Jones, a warfare tactics instructor from Surface and Mine Warfare Development Center, in the release. The missile was fielded for both the Independent and Freedom-variants of the littoral combat ship in 2019, according to the Navy.

The LCS was originally tasked with conducting surface warfare, mine countermeasures and anti-submarine warfare, but the Navy’s fiscal 2023 budget revealed the service intends to strike the anti-submarine warfare mission package from LCS ships. According to Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday, the anti-submarine warfare package was not operating well in testing. Meanwhile, the Navy is also aiming to decommission some LCS ships, according to the service’s budget request. The Navy is seeking to decommission 24 ships from the fleet, including nine Freedom-variant littoral combat ships.

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said the service is focusing on outfitting ships with the right capabilities to accomplish their missions, and that ships that can’t combat threats are useless. “It just doesn’t do me good to have lots and lots of ships that aren’t effective against the actual threat itself,” Del Toro said at the Navy League’s annual Sea-Air-Space conference in April. “It’s a combination of the right capacity, right capability to deliver the right lethality where we need it.” [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | May 17, 2022 ++]

Military Myths & Legends

Update 06: Mr. Rogers Was a Deadly Military Sniper

You know Fred Rogers, or Mister Rogers, from the eponymous children’s program, which broadcast from 1968 to 2001. The cardigans, the puppets, the general kindness and decency.

Someone only Tom Hanks could portray in a biopic. And maybe you've heard that those sweaters were concealing a dark past? That before teaming up with Henrietta Pussycat and King Friday XIII, Fred Rogers was the ultimate badass – a tattooed, death dealing sniper? It's a common urban legend: Mister Rogers was in Vietnam. Mister Rogers was a Navy SEAL. Mister Rogers was a Marine sniper. Maybe Mister Rogers' neighborhood was so nice because he's a battle-hardened ex-operator, keeping everyone else in line.

Of course, none of this is true. Born in 1928, Fred Rogers was too young to serve in World War II, and while he registered for the draft in 1946 and 1948, when he reported for a physical in 1950 he was declared unqualified for military service. By the time the Navy SEAL program was founded in 1962, Fred Rogers was graduating from a seminary program and starting his first children's program on Canadian television. Just a year later he was already ineligible for induction into military service due to age. And just for the record, here is a denunciation from actual former Navy SEALs:

“While there are rumors that Mr. Rogers, the host of internationally acclaimed TV show for children – Mister Roger's Neighborhood, served as a Navy SEAL or a Marine Scout Sniper during the Vietnam era with a large number of confirmed kills, we have to state it is false. Mr. Rogers never served in the military,” say the former SEALs. Suffice to say, the man was not some kind of secret Carlos Hathcock who had simply moved back to Pittsburgh to teach kids how to be a good neighbor. So where does this myth come from?

An episode of the Moviemakers podcast, hosted by Tim Molloy and interviewing “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood” screenwriters Noah Harpster and Micah Fitzerman-Blue, along with author Tom Junod, has some answers. For one, Junod describes swimming with Rogers and seeing his distinct lack of tattoos. No tribal bands. No barbed wire? No face of a stern command sergeant major permanently emblazoned on your bicep? Already another strike against the urban legend. But the screenwriters also dug into Rogers' past and offered up an explanation as to what may have started the rumor.

“So there was actually a guy named Fred Rogers, who was a Marine, who was a sharpshooter, who started a security business. And he for a moment put up FredRogers.com as his business,” Harpster said. “And it was almost immediately taken down. But people found that.” And ever since, the vague idea that America's most wholesome children's entertainer was hiding a saltier past carried on in one form or another.

Of course, Mr. Rogers isn't alone in this. Bob Bell, who portrayed the possibly entertaining and possibly nightmare-inducing Bozo the Clown for years, actually memorized an eye chart to cover up an eye injury and enlist in the Marines, and later served in the Navy during World War II. And perhaps you've heard the rumor that floppy-haired 1970s children's television host Bob

Keeshan, better known as Captain Kangaroo, stormed the beaches of Iwo Jima? Also untrue, and possibly the result of an apocryphal anecdote told by actor Lee Marvin to Johnny Carson on The Tonight Show. Keeshan was a Marine but enlisted in 1945, too late to deploy overseas. Marvin was wounded at Saipan.

There are also the stories of people who don't exactly fit the military mold of serving. Maybe you were shipmates with Lenny Bruce. Or bucking Air Force discipline with George Carlin and Hunter S. Thompson. Jumping out of planes with Jimi Hendrix or perhaps showing up to formation at West Point naked with Edgar Allan Poe. There's a part of us that likes to think of these distinctly non-military personalities as having at one time gone through the same events, and been in the same places that all military veterans have. Perhaps the Fred Rogers as a deadly sniper mythos is part of a similar trend.

"Urban legends sometimes distort the positive to create a sense of intrigue," Trevor J. Blank, an assistant professor of communication at the State University of New York at Potsdam told History.com, adding that "Him having a very macho back story or being a ruthless killer is kind of titillating; it runs counter to what you're presented as true in your day-to-day experience." As for Fred Rogers, no, he was never a sniper. Maybe he would have joined the Space Force, though. [Source: Task & Purpose | Max Hauptman | May 16, 2022 ++]

MASH 8055th

Distinguished Military Unit

In stark contrast with the mission of combat forces, the US Army Medical Corps is committed to providing aid and comfort to the injured: wounded soldiers, civilians, and at times even enemy personnel. There are no medals, no glory, and heroism is measured in blood, sweat, and tears. Though the Korean War has been regarded as a failure by many because of its indecisive outcomes, in one area, it was an unbridled success-saving lives. When the war broke out in Korea on June 25, 1950, only two hundred doctors were in the entire Far East Command (Japan, Guam, the Philippines, and Korea). To ensure combat medical services, Congress quickly passed the Doctors Draft Act, requiring all doctors under the age of fifty-one to register for military service.

As a result, ninety percent of all staff doctors in Korea were draftees, displaying a more relaxed attitude about Army rules, regulations, and discipline. At this same time, the Army authorized new medical procedures and deployed groundbreaking methods for transport and treatment of the injured, effectively reinventing combat care. One such development was the

Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH), popularized by Dr. H. Richard Hornberger, in his 1968 best-selling book (MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors), subsequent movie, and television series based on his real-life experience with the MASH 8055th.

In World War II, the fatality rate for seriously wounded soldiers was 4.5 percent. In the Korean War, that number was cut almost in half, to 2.5 percent. That success is attributed to a combination of the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, or MASH unit, and the aeromedical evacuation system comprised of the casualty evacuation (casevac) and medical evacuation (medevac) helicopters. Comprised of a series of tents and buildings that could be easily relocated as the front lines moved, the MASH units moved with them to keep the units as close to the front as possible. To accomplish this, accommodations were stark, with operating tables formed by a stretcher balanced across two sawhorses.

In past conflicts, wounded soldiers often had to wait hours to be treated, but thanks to the MASH units and the helicopters that brought in the wounded, the wait time was reduced to minutes. As the centerpiece of the Army's medical innovations, these mobile units were fully self-contained, working hospitals, first conceived in 1945 at the close of World War II and the brainchild of Dr. Michael DeBakey. Aside from the constant stress of warfare and long hours in surgery, the units usually picked up and moved at least once a month, which came to be known as "bugging out." Specifically, standards for a MASH required that it was disassembled, loaded onto vehicles, and ready to depart on a six-hour notice. After arrival at its new destination, it was operational within four hours.

In Korea, US soldiers wounded at the battlefield were first attended to on-site by medics and doctors attached to their unit. If the injuries were severe, the men were then evacuated to a MASH unit for surgery and recovery. If warranted, the soldiers were evacuated to a larger hospital for treatment and, if very serious, sent home from there. Initially limited to 60 beds to focus on mobility, with only seven MASH units in Korea (8054th, 8055th, 8063rd, 8076th, 8209th, 8225th, and 8228th), the hospitals were often overwhelmed with wounded and enlarged to 150 beds in November 1950, and again in May 1951 to 200. With the Doctor's Draft Act of 1950, the timing of this expansion worked well for draftees that began to arrive in January 1951.

Similarly, about 540 nurses served tours of duty on the Korean peninsula. Though women weren't allowed on the front lines in combat roles, these nurses served close to the front lines and sometimes in the line of fire. In fact, by the end of the war, Army nurses had received 9 Legions of Merit, 120 Bronze Stars, and 173 Commendation Ribbons.

Much like MASH units, in the early 1950s, the helicopter was still in its infancy. A few made an appearance in the last days of World War II, but now they would be tested on the front lines in Korea. The helicopters carried no guns; they were equipped only with exterior pods and stretchers to extract wounded from the battlefield. They were fragile, high-maintenance aircraft

with limited range. The early models had no radio or instrument lights in their cockpits. They couldn't operate in bad weather, were limited on where they could land and were fatally vulnerable to enemy ground fire. In January 1951, four aeromedical evacuation helicopter detachments arrived in Korea, medevacs that would transport more than 20,000 casualties during the war, with one pilot (1st Lt. Joseph L. Bowler) setting a record of 824 medical evacuations over a 10-month period.

Perhaps a measure of the helicopter's impact is evident with the successful evacuation of 750 critically wounded soldiers in one day, Feb. 20, 1951, half of whom would have died, according to one surgeon, if only ground transportation had been used. Once the choppers arrived with their wounded, the medical teams unloaded the patients and prepared them for surgery. "There were times when the medical personnel were overloaded, so the pilots would help bring in the wounded and even help the doctors with instruments from time to time."

Richard Kirkland had always wanted to fly, a dream he'd had since he was a young boy. During World War II, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps and was about to deploy as a member of the 3rd Rescue Squadron flying helicopters. On one of his first nights in Korea, he was introduced to many of the doctors and nurses of the MASH 8055th. There Richard was befriended by two men who would later be commemorated in print and inspire generations through film and television. "One of the surgeons shook hands, saying, 'They call me Hawkeye-welcome to MASH. The M stands for mud.'" This, of course, was Dr. Hornberger, who later wrote about his experience with the 8055th under the pen name Richard Hooker.

A second tent mate, Capt. Michael Johnson was the basis for the character Trapper John. In Korea, Hornberger pioneered a kind of surgery that was prohibited during the war. "Hornberger possessed the courage and audacity to attempt arterial repair when it was forbidden, and by one account, he may have been the first." Despite the rules and encouraged by early success, with the routine use of vascular surgery during the Korean War, doctors reduced the amputation rate resulting from vascular injury to 20.5 percent from 49.6 percent during World War II.

In a broad sense, with MASH units in place, the Korean War provided an opportunity to study and test new equipment and procedures, many of which would become standards of care in both military and civilian medicine; vascular reconstruction, artificial kidneys, improved cold weather treatments, the newest antibiotics, and other drugs (anticoagulant heparin, sedative Nembutal, serum albumin and whole blood to treat shock) that advanced medical care. In addition, computerized data collection (in the form of computer punch cards) and the use of plastic bags for the transport and handling of blood- a method later adopted around the world and still used today.

Life in a MASH unit varied greatly between boredom and endless hours of surgery due to overwhelming casualties. During a "push" (offensive front-line action), the wounded streamed

into the operating room for days. Otto Apel, a MASH doctor, remembers, "Seventy-two hours after I had arrived at MASH 8076, I had lost the sense of feeling in my feet. I do not think I had spoken to anyone ... for at least twelve hours." Dr. Apel, it turned out, had performed non-stop surgeries for eighty hours upon his arrival. Harold Secor, a surgeon for the 8055th, recalls that staffing was lean, perhaps thirty corpsmen, ten doctors, ten nurses, one dentist, two service corps officers, and about thirty Koreans.

Compounding matters was the units' proximity to the front line. The 8055th was generally four to five miles behind the front lines, and according to Dr. Secor, "If they pulled back very far, we were on the enemy side; that happened at least once. We had a minefield in our front yard. There was always some danger, even from our own artillery firing over us. We had sandbags around the patient tents to stop stray bullets". Secor remembered that one day, "a bullet zinged into the mess tent, hit a post, and splashed into a cup of coffee." He said, "This was one of the accepted things that it didn't pay to dwell on."

As United Nations (U.N.) troops crossed the 38th parallel and advanced north in the fall of 1950, they encountered a civilian population decimated by epidemics of typhus, smallpox, and typhoid. In addition, captured North Korean and later Chinese troops were ill with these and other contagious diseases. But most troubling was mentions of men turning black as they died, suggesting bubonic plague - the Black Death - was in Korea. But as it turned out, the plague was actually a virulent form of smallpox known as hemorrhagic smallpox. As a result, the 8228th MASH was established for the sole purpose of eradicating these diseases among enemy and civilian populations.

By late 1951, the front line stopped moving and, for the most part, remained in place until the war was over in 1953, negating the need for hospital mobility. Accordingly, the MASH units were replaced with smaller, more efficient combat surgical hospitals (CSH) and forward surgical teams (FST). At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was only one MASH unit left in the world, in Albania, the last to be deactivated in February 2006. Nonetheless, MASH units and the helicopter evacuations developed during the Korean War became the standard for operations in Vietnam and later Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The visionary surgeon and inventor Dr. DeBakey went on to become renowned for pioneering developments, including coronary bypass operations, carotid endarterectomy, artificial hearts, and ventricular assist devices, grafts to replace or repair blood vessels, and surgical repairs of aortic aneurysms, receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the National Medal of Science, and the Congressional Gold Medal. Despite this acclaim, perhaps the most remarkable contribution centered on a brief and often forgotten moment in time, in a faraway land, where citizen surgeons and nurses gathered to defend freedom, advance medical science, and risk everything to save lives. [Source: TWS Newsletter/May 2022]

WWII Japanese-American Internments

FDR Executive Order 9066 Imprisons 120,000

On Feb. 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, forcibly removing over 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent from their homes. These Americans would remain in internment camps for over three years, a civil rights violation that called into question claims of moral superiority by the United States during World War II. Although claimed to be done for security reasons, many felt that the policy was due to racism and discrimination, a way of othering (i.e. a phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are defined and labeled as not fitting in within the norms of a social group) American citizens of Asian descent for actions outside of their control.

While the use of internment camps during World War II has been acknowledged as a dark stain on American history, the othering of Asian Americans due to world events continues. Last year saw a 164% rise in anti-Asian hate crimes in the largest cities of the nation during the first quarter of 2021, and multiple attacks against Asian communities occurred throughout the country amid false narratives assigning blame for the Covid-19 pandemic. Even today, distrust of Asian Americans in the U.S. population is growing, with one and five Americans feeling that they are at least partly responsible for the virus.

Before the U.S. became involved in the Second World War after the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had identified German, Italian, and Japanese persons who were suspected of being potential enemy agents, keeping them under surveillance.

The unlawful detention of Asian Americans during World War II remains disturbingly relevant. When America entered the hostilities, however, it was only those of Japanese descent who were targeted for mass imprisonment in internment camps. First, immediately after the attacks, over 1,500 Asian Americans were arrested by the FBI, Office of Naval Intelligence and the Army G-2. In January 1942, the Secretary of the Navy falsely blamed Japanese Americans for assisting Imperial Japanese forces in their attack on the installation. President Roosevelt signed executive order 9066 a month later.

The West Coast was declared a military area. Army Lt. Gen. Don Dewitt of the Western Defense Command announced a curfew that was only targeted toward Japanese Americans and tried to “encourage” voluntary relocation for these citizens. A month later, on March 29, backed by legislation from Congress, Dewitt issued a public proclamation that mandated the forced relocation of Japanese Americans within 48 hours. Thousands of American citizens had only two days to sell or arrange for care of their property, businesses and personal belongings. Those

who could not, which were many, lost these precious things forever. It took until 1988 for survivors of the internment camps to receive reparations, \$20,000 for each surviving living person who was there.

No one knew where they were going or for how long and families were then loaded into trucks, buses, and trains; first to 17 temporary assembly centers, then to 10 hastily constructed relocation centers. The assembly centers were often in remote areas, such as reconfigured fairgrounds or racing tracks and thousands of Japanese Americans found themselves living in horse stables or cow sheds, often packed in together and suffering from a lack of food and sanitation facilities. In Hawaii, where Japanese Americans made up almost half the population (150,000 of the 370,000 people there in 1937), the government, partly for economic reasons, did not force them into internment camps but made the islands themselves a prison with the imposition of martial law.

The permanent relocation centers would be their homes for the next three years. Life in the camps was emotionally, physically, and spiritually taxing. Each camp was its own town, with farmland, schools, post offices and other facilities, located on military bases and Native American reservations. Prisoners could work at these camps doing various jobs, from doctors to mechanics to teachers. But no one would be paid no more than an Army private, no matter their skill set or previous occupation. About 1,000 Japanese American prisoners were sent to do seasonal work on farms across the Midwest. About 4,000 were allowed to go to college.

The vast majority were forced to stay. The camps were prisoner of war facilities in all but name, surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers. Fatal violence was used against those interned for even the slightest violations: Toshio Kobata and Hirota Isomura, two elderly men, were killed on July 27, 1942, by a sentry who claimed they were trying to escape. Multiple witnesses, however, testified the sentry murdered the two men for simply struggling on a march. In 1943, 63-year-old prisoner James Hatsuki Wakasa was shot and killed for no other reason than walking near the perimeter fence of his camp in New Mexico. There were at least seven confirmed deaths by gunfire alone — among other injuries due to heavy-handed and egregious use of force by the U.S. government during protests at the Manzanar camp in Dec. 1942, and the Tule Lake Camp in 1943. Just over 1,800 Asian Americans died overall during this wrongful captivity.

When the nation needed more troops during the conflict, however, thousands of these citizens enlisted, proving their loyalty even as their family members remained imprisoned. The first such unit to be formed was the 100th Infantry Battalion activated on June 12, 1942, which consisted of Japanese Americans and was created from the 298th and 299th Infantry Regiments of the Hawaii National Guard. After training in the United States throughout 1942, the battalion was sent to Europe to participate in the Italian campaign as part of the 34th Infantry Division. On Sept. 23, 1943, they had their first combat experience near Salerno, Italy. Assigned to the

vanguard of the 34th's 133rd Infantry Regiment, the 100th advanced 15 miles in 24 hours "in the face of strong enemy resistance and over difficult terrain," part of an advance that would see them capture the town of Benevento in early October.

Members of the battalion were awarded six Distinguished Service Crosses during the first eight weeks of combat, alongside three Presidential Unit citations. In mid-January 1944, the battalion was committed to the attack on Monte Cassino, a horrific war of attrition that saw the Allies suffer 55,000 casualties in three months to the German's 20,000 as they fought to open the road to Rome. The battalion was nicknamed the "Purple Heart Battalion" by the end of the battle, and of the 1,300 men it entered Italy with, only 521 were fit to fight five months later.

The 100th Infantry Battalion received replacements in the form of the second Japanese American Army unit formed for combat in the European theater: the 442nd Infantry Regiment. In 1943 the Army ordered the creation of the 442nd Infantry, made up of second-generation Japanese Americans, for use in the European theater because of fears they would be mistaken for enemy troops in the Pacific. The Army called for the regiment to be filled with 4,200 volunteers. Almost 12,000 Japanese-Americans answered that first call.

The 442nd would arrive in Italy in June 1944, and then, alongside the 100th Infantry Battalion joined the 36th Infantry Division in the invasion of Southern France. Battling throughout Southern France and to the Vosges Mountains that marked the eastern French and German border, the 442nd engaged in a month of heavy combat from October to November 1944 that saw them liberate two French villages. During the last week of October, the regiment was called upon to rescue the "Lost Battalion" of the 141st Infantry Regiment, which was surrounded by German forces who repelled multiple attempts to relieve the unit. The 442nd was the final unit to be sent and it was the final one needed as they accomplished their mission and rescued 275 trapped soldiers at the cost of 800 casualties to their regiment.

This achievement of arms was one of many for the American soldiers of Japanese descent during the war. The 100th and 442nd participated in six campaigns during World War II and became the most decorated unit for its size. More than 20 Medal of Honors were awarded to members of the 442nd, along with 560 Silver Stars, 4,000 Bronze Stars, over 4,000 Purple Hearts and seven Presidential Unit Citations.

In 1945, the war ended and the soldiers of the 442nd returned home as the United States government decided to end its policy of interning Japanese Americans in March 1946. Like African American soldiers who fought during the conflict, they faced racial discrimination despite their sacrifices; many of those imprisoned could not even get their own land back as laws in some states enshrined this racism. There were also violent attacks on Japanese Americans after the war, including bombings and gunfire, as these citizens began the decades-long process to rebuild their lives.

Spearheaded by the families of those interned and inspired in the 1960s by the African American Civil Rights Movement, Americans began to question and then take action against the government's rationale for these internments. It would take over 40 years after World War II for these Americans, whose sole crime was the color of their skin, to receive any form of redress or reparations. [Source: Task & Purpose | Daniel Johnson | May 18, 2022 ++]

Drug Price Gouging

Update 10: Drug Companies Lobby Spending to Justify & Allow It

The high cost of prescription drugs is on the top of the list of concerns that many seniors have, especially as the increasing rate of inflation has forced so many seniors to spend their limited income on other necessary items. TSCL has been fighting to get Congress to lower drug prices, but the legislation is blocked in the Senate because of disagreements between and among Republicans and Democrats. Part of the reason for that is the huge amount of money the big drug companies have been spending to lobby Congress not to pass new legislation.

In addition, there has been infighting between various businesses and groups that are part of the complicated system that provides prescription drugs to the American people, one side blaming the other for the high prices, while also fighting to maintain their huge profits. Last week, StatNews, a news source that reports exclusively on health care issues, published an article about a man who was “a pioneer of the argument that drugs were often underpriced and prices should be based on their value to patients and society, a strategy today known as value-based pricing. If someone thought the price was too high, then they simply needed to be educated about the drug's true value. It is an argument that drug companies have used to justify ever-higher prices.”

The man, whose name is Mick Kolassa, was at one time “perhaps the most sought-after drug pricing guru in the United States.” But, according to the article, “... in recent years, he has mostly stepped away from consulting about drug pricing, dismayed by how companies were distorting the concept of ‘value-based pricing’ and taking advantage of a broken market to price gouge. According to the article, “The language of ‘value’ became not simply part of the decision-making process leading to those higher prices, but also the way to justify them to the public. It eventually replaced the traditional explanation of high R&D costs as the industry's go-to defense for high drug prices.

“As more and more drug companies became aggressive on pricing, there were increases not just in launch prices but also in the emergence of regular price increases for drugs that were

already on the market.” There is much more information in the article, and you can read it in its entirety by clicking <https://www.statnews.com/2022/05/13/kolassa-wrote-drug-pricing-playbook-then-stepped-awa>. But the article makes clear, as TSCL has been saying for a long time, drug prices are way too high, and Congress needs to take action immediately to lower drug prices – regardless of what the big drug companies are saying. For more on the Drug Pricing Playbook check out:

- <https://www.ft.com/content/47227db2-8489-11e8-a29d-73e3d454535d>
- <https://www.cidsa.org/publications/drug-spending-savers-policy-playbook>

[Source: TSCL Weekly Update | May 16, 2022 ++]

Military Health Care

Update 05: Medical Forces Could Be Shorthanded During War Due to Planned Cuts

The U.S. military's top officer expressed concern 11 MAY over a Defense Department plan to cut nearly 13,000 military health jobs, saying the reductions could leave the medical forces short during wartime. Testifying as part of a House hearing on the DoD budget Wednesday, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Mark Milley said the proposed cuts -- an element of larger health reform initiatives at the DoD -- are "OK on a day-to-day basis" when providers are in protected hospital settings, but they could be a significant challenge with troops in harm's way.

Milley raised questions over whether there would be a sufficient number of doctors, nurses, corpsmen and medics to man combat hospitals and fighting units. "Candidly, I do have concerns," Milley said. "[Medical readiness is] a very challenging subset of our overall military personnel challenges, but one, in particular, that causes great attention because in time of war, as we all know, there'll be significant casualties. In peacetime, you're manning these treatment facilities ... but in wartime, they're going to go forward, and that is where the readiness issues will show up."

Advertisement

Congress authorized the DoD in 2017 to revamp its medical system, with an aim to curb the rising costs of providing medical care for 9.6 million service members, military retirees and their families. Under the plan, the DoD's Defense Health Agency is to operate the health care system, including running military hospitals and clinics and providing care to non-military beneficiaries. Service medical commands will focus on caring for U.S. troops in DHA facilities and deployment settings, including combat, and training medical personnel for operations.

As part of the plan, the military services are expected to cut roughly 12,800 military health billets, and the Defense Health Agency will downsize or close 50 health facilities. The reductions were placed on hold during the pandemic, but DHA officials said earlier this year that they would proceed with the reforms this year. Some hospitals and clinics have begun feeling the pinch of the reductions, having let positions that are expected to be eliminated go unfilled as troops leave the service or depart for another duty station. Lawmakers whose districts will be affected by the changes have raised concerns over the reforms, which they say already are affecting medical care.

Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-WA) said in May 2021 that the staff at Naval Hospital Bremerton had been reduced by more than 100 billets in the previous year, causing patients to "lose access to quality care. The realignment is not only affecting the military hospital in my region, but is affecting many other districts across the country as well," Kilmer said during a hearing on the military health system. "When hospital staff leave, either because they retire or move to another installation, their positions are no longer being filled."

Following reporting from Military.com, Rep. Greg Murphy (R-NC) wrote a letter to Defense Health Agency Director Lt. Gen. Ronald Place on 6 APR asking him to look into servicewomen and military spouses facing challenges getting timely appointments for maternity care in the area surrounding Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, as a result of a shortage of providers at the naval hospital on base. "This issue may not be just one that my district is experiencing but may be systemic to all military hospitals due to reforms DHA is leading to cut costs across the system," Murphy wrote. "Military dependents are being forced to find private physicians to care for them. In the case of Jacksonville, for example, there may not be enough OB/GYNS to care for our expectant mothers."

The Defense Department's proposed fiscal 2023 budget calls for \$54 billion for the military health system, a nearly 8% increase from the start of the pandemic. During the hearing 11 MAY, members of the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee did not comment on the medical budget request, nor did the representative who asked the question -- Arizona Democrat Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, whose district includes Fort Huachuca and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base -- give Milley any feedback. Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), the subcommittee chairwoman, did promise to hold a hearing specifically on the military health system. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | May 11, 2022 ++]

Covid-19 Testing

Update 15: FDA Issues Warning About Counterfeit Covid Tests

On top of the increasing number of covid-related infections and deaths, last week the Food and Drug Administration put out a warning that the public needs to be aware of counterfeit at-home over the counter (OTC) COVID-19 diagnostic tests circulating in the United States. According to a press release from the FDA, "Counterfeit COVID-19 tests are tests that are not authorized, cleared, or approved by the FDA for distribution or use in the United States, but are made to look like authorized tests so the users will think they are the real, FDA-authorized test."

The FDA is currently aware of two counterfeit at-home diagnostic tests: counterfeit Flowflex COVID-19 Antigen Home Tests and iHealth COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test Kits. Here are some of the signs to look for in order to detect a counterfeit covid test:

- Poor print quality of images or text on the outside box label for the product or in the instructions for use included in the box.
- Missing information on the outside box label for the product, such as the lot number, expiration date, or barcode or QR codes.
- Grammatical or spelling errors found in product labeling.
- Components of the kits do not match the content description (for example, missing Instructions for Use, missing or unfilled components, different number of components than listed).
- Tradename for product printed on component or box labels differ from the authorized labeling found on the FDA website: At-Home OTC COVID-19 Diagnostic Tests | FDA.
- The box label or printed instructions for use look different from the authorized labeling found on the FDA website: At-Home OTC COVID-19 Diagnostic Tests | FDA.

You can more information about the FDA warning here: Counterfeit Covid Tests at https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/coronavirus-covid-19-and-medical-devices/counterfeit-home-otc-covid-19-diagnostic-tests?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery. [Source: TSCL Weekly Update | May 16, 2022 ++]

Gulf War Syndrome

Update 48: Researchers Think They've Found the Cause

After nearly 30 years of trying to prove a theory -- that an environmental toxin was responsible for sickening roughly 250,000 U.S. troops who served in the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War -- Dr. Robert Haley says new research confirms that sarin nerve gas caused Gulf War Illness.

Following the Gulf War, nearly one-third of all who deployed reported unexplained chronic symptoms such as rashes, fatigue, gastrointestinal and digestive issues, brain "fog," neuropathy, and muscle and joint pain. Federal agencies spent years broadly dismissing the idea that troops may have been suffering from exposure to chemical agents, with many veterans experiencing symptoms sent to mental health providers. But a study published last week in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* used genetic research and survey data to determine that U.S. service members exposed to sarin were more likely to develop Gulf War Illness, and those who were exposed and had a weaker variant of a gene that helps digest pesticides were nine times more likely to have symptoms.

"Quite simply, our findings prove that Gulf War illness was caused by sarin, which was released when we bombed Iraqi chemical weapons storage and production facilities," said Haley, director of the Division of Epidemiology in the Internal Medicine Department at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. "There are still more than 100,000 Gulf War veterans who are not getting help for this illness and our hope is that these findings will accelerate the search for better treatment," Haley said.

Originally developed as a pesticide, the chemical weapon sarin was known to have been stockpiled by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein prior to and after the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War. The synthetic nerve agent attacks the central nervous system and brain, killing victims by triggering an overreaction of neurotransmitters that causes convulsions and asphyxiation. Thousands of coalition troops likely were exposed to sarin and cyclosarin, an organic phosphate also used as a chemical weapon, when the U.S. destroyed a bunker housing chemical weapons at the Khamisiyah Ammunition Storage Depot in southern Iraq, sending a plume of contaminants that spread across a 25-mile radius.

Others may have been subjected to low levels of contaminants, as troops frequently reported that chemical weapons alarms went off in the absence of any apparent attack. In the years following the war, veterans who sought medical help at the Department of Veterans Affairs were greeted with skepticism and sent to psychiatrists for mental health treatment. Health surveys conducted by the VA in the early 2010s of Gulf War veterans focused mainly on questions about psychological and psychiatric symptoms. And in 2013, veterans' suspicions of the lack of concern at the VA were confirmed when VA whistleblower and epidemiologist Steven Coughlin came forward to say that the department buried or obscured research findings that would link physical ailments to military service -- a concerted effort to deny veterans health care and benefits.

Coughlin's charges were later confirmed by an email sent to staff from former Undersecretary for Benefits Allison Hickey expressing concern that changing what the VA still calls "chronic multisymptom illness" to "Gulf War illness" might "imply a causal link between

service in the Gulf and poor health which could necessitate legislation for disability compensation for veterans who served in the Gulf."

Research Confirms Earlier, Smaller Studies

For the new study into sarin, Haley and colleagues randomly selected 1,116 veterans who completed a U.S. Military Health Survey, including 508 who deployed and developed Gulf War Illness and 508 veterans who went but never developed symptoms. They collected blood and DNA samples from each participant and asked the veterans whether they heard nerve gas alarms during their deployment, and if so, how often. The researchers also tested for variants of a gene that helps the body metabolize pesticides, called PON1. Some people have variants of this gene that are more effective in breaking down sarin while others have a variant that helps process chemicals like pesticides but is less efficient against sarin.

The study found that those who reported hearing nerve agent alarms and who also had the least robust form of the gene had a nine-fold chance of having Gulf War Illness. Those with a genotype that is a mix of the two variants had more than four times the chance of having Gulf War Illness, while those who just heard nerve agent alarms, which the researchers used as a proxy for exposure, raised the chance of developing the condition by nearly four times, although to a lesser degree of those who have a mix of genes.

According to the researchers, the data "leads to a high degree of confidence that sarin is a causative agent for Gulf War Illness. Our hypothesis was, if you have the strong form of the gene, then when you're exposed to low-level sarin, that gene makes a strong isoenzyme that destroys sarin in your blood. If you have the weak form of the gene, the enzyme that it makes is not very strong, so it goes through your blood into your brain and you get sick," Haley said in an interview with Military.com. "You've heard the expression 'correlation does not equal causation,' right? That's true, unless you are dealing with a gene-environment interaction."

A Mysterious Malady

The mysterious symptoms experienced by thousands of service members, which came to be known as Gulf War Syndrome and, later, Gulf War Illness, generated hypotheses of the possible cause, including an additive in anthrax vaccines, preventive medicines given to troops such as the anti-nerve agent pyridostigmine bromide, ciprofloxacin, depleted uranium, and exposure to nerve gas, pesticides or smoke from oil well fires.

A congressional investigation in 1997 concluded that the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs had very little interest in finding a cause and blamed the symptoms as related to stress or other mental health disorders. In its report, the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight found that the DoD and VA were "plagued by arrogant incuriosity and a pervasive myopia that sees a lack of evidence as proof" that the illness didn't exist. "Sadly, when it comes

to diagnosis, treatment and research for Gulf War veterans, we find the Federal Government too often has a tin ear, a cold heart and a closed mind," the report noted.

As Congress investigated the issue, Haley was studying possible causes, funded by Ross Perot, the Texas billionaire and Navy veteran known for donating to veterans' charities and resources, including efforts to help U.S. prisoners of war in Vietnam. Haley's early work pointed to sarin as a possible cause, but other scientists, including the medical body of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, found his studies to be insufficient in size and suffering from selection or "recall bias," meaning that vets may or may not remember whether they heard nerve gas alarms and how often.

Haley said the new research links veterans with Gulf War Illness with their genotype and "cannot be explained away by errors in recalling the environmental exposure or other biases in the data." Others now concur. In an editorial accompanying the study, Marc Weisskopf, a professor of environmental epidemiology and psychology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Kimberly Sullivan, a research associate professor with Boston University School of Public Health, said the study makes a strong case for a causal link and explains, to some extent, why some troops got sick and some did not. "The authors' exploration of a gene-environment interaction between presumed nerve agent exposure and the PON1 gene offers some strong arguments that there is a true causal effect at work," they wrote in their opinion piece.

The VA has established service connection for Gulf War veterans with certain chronic, unexplained symptoms, which the department calls "chronic multisymptom illness" or "undiagnosed illness." Those who have certain symptoms, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and some gastrointestinal disorders, and served in the 1990-1991 conflict do not have to prove service connection and are eligible for benefits including a health exam, health care and disability compensation. Historically, however, the VA has been strict in determining service connection. A 2017 Government Accountability Office report found the VA denied 83% of 102,000 claims filed for Gulf War Illness between 1994 and 2015.

New Hope

Haley said the research could pave the way for more veterans to access health care and benefits and open up research into possible treatments. He said that the symptoms are caused by brain inflammation, which may be treatable once scientists figure out exactly how sarin works. "Once we know, we could come up with treatments to reverse it," Haley said. "I really believe this is optimistic and that it means this is not brain damage. This is not loss of neurons and like a stroke or something that you're never going to recover from."

Among the veterans excited about the new study is Paul Sullivan, a Persian Gulf War veteran who works as director of veteran outreach at the law firm Bergmann & Moore and deployed to Iraq as an Army cavalry scout with the 1st Armored Division in 1991. He said the results provide evidence that affected veterans need to access care from the VA. "This landmark study provides a clear path for VA to presume sarin exposure for all 1991 Gulf War veterans," Sullivan said Thursday. "The study provides a compelling missing scientific link for treatment research for my fellow Gulf War Veterans disabled since our exposures during Desert Storm."

Haley said he has received letters from veterans asking if they could get tested for the different types of the PON1 gene and whether it would be helpful. Routine genetic testing does not include PON1, but further research may lead to a diagnostic test that would provide peace of mind to veterans, he said. The research was conducted in collaboration with a survey research team from North Carolina-based RTI International and funded by the DoD and VA, both of which have funded thousands of studies on Gulf War Illness despite long-standing skepticism. "This is the scientific process. Nobody's bad. Nobody's good. People have their theories. Skepticism is the name of the game. That is what makes it fun," Haley said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | May 17, 2022 ++]

Bursitis

Update 01: Recognition and Treatment

Bursitis is an inflammation in one of the small, fluid-filled sacs (bursae) often found near joints in the body. It can be very painful and limit mobility. The inflammation can result when too much pressure is put on one of these sacs (a bursa). The bursae (Latin for bags) are made of connective tissue and filled with synovial fluid. Like tiny pillows, they cushion parts of the body like the elbows, which are often exposed to friction or pressure. When you prop your elbows on a hard tabletop, the bursa prevents the bone from pressing too hard against your skin. There are over one hundred bursae in the human body, many of them near joints.

If a bursa becomes inflamed, more fluid will build up inside it than usual. Doctors call this effusion. This leads to swelling that you can feel and see from the outside – especially if the inflamed bursa is right under the skin. The swollen area hurts when resting, but is especially painful when moved or when pressure is put on it from the outside. It sometimes looks red and feel warm too. You may also develop a fever and generally feel unwell.

Bursae often become inflamed if they are injured by a heavy blow – for example during a fall – or if they are irritated by too much friction or pressure. For this reason, some jobs are associated with a higher risk of bursitis. Tile installers are a typical example: Their work often

involves kneeling on hard floors, so it's not unusual for them to develop kneecap bursitis. Other high-risk occupations include cleaners, carpenters, roofers and gardeners. Working for a long time at a computer or doing some types of sports such as volleyball may also make bursitis more likely. Germs like bacteria can enter the bursa too, causing inflammation there. This may happen due to an injury – but it's often not possible to tell how the bacteria got inside the bursa.

Sometimes inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and gout spread to the bursae as well, causing bursitis. Each year, at least 1 out of 10,000 people develop bursitis on the knees or elbows alone. One third of these inflammations are caused by a bacterial infection. Middle-aged men are often affected. That's probably because they more commonly have jobs that are associated with a greater risk of bursitis. If the area is rested, the inflammation usually goes away within 2 or 3 weeks. Sometimes it remains permanently, though – for example, because the person continues (or has to continue) doing the activity that caused it in the first place. Chronic diseases such as diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis may delay recovery too, or even make the inflammation worse.

Inflamed bursae that are right under the skin can easily be diagnosed: They are swollen and painful, and are sensitive to pressure. Reddened, warm skin is also a sign of inflammation. Bursitis most commonly affects the elbows, knees, shoulders, hips and feet. Bursitis can also be caused by a – usually bacterial – infection. It is important to find out whether the inflammation is caused by bacteria. If you have a fever and/or a wound close to the inflamed area, it is likely to be a bacterial infection. In order to check whether that is the case, the doctor takes some fluid from the bursa using a hollow needle (cannula) and has it tested in a laboratory. Blood tests can detect further signs of an infection or show whether the inflammation is being caused by a disease such as gout.

Imaging techniques like ultrasound or x-rays are used to rule out other possible causes of the symptoms, such as bone or joint injuries. They can also help to check whether the bursitis may have already damaged nearby tissue. The most commonly recommended treatments for bursitis involve keeping the swollen area still (immobilized) and protecting it from further pressure. Things like cold packs or painkillers can help. After the inflammation goes away, it's important to avoid putting too much pressure on the joint to stop bursitis from coming back. For instance, people who often work in a kneeling position can use kneepads to protect their knees. If you are wondering whether such measures could help, you can seek advice – perhaps from an occupational health specialist.

If the bursitis doesn't get better or comes back despite taking the measures described here, steroids are sometimes injected into the bursa. If the inflammation becomes chronic, the affected bursa is usually surgically removed. In cases where bursitis is caused by a bacterial infection, surgery is more urgently recommended. But bacterial bursitis is first treated with antibiotics, which is often enough. Steroids aren't used, though. They would do more harm than

good in this case. Other medication may be needed if the bursitis is caused by a particular medical condition like gout or rheumatoid arthritis. [Source: <https://www.informedhealth.org/bursitis.html> | May 2022 ++]

Military Overseas Taxation

Update 04: Court Decision May Offer Line of Defense for Some

A potentially precedent-setting decision by Germany’s top fiscal court to overturn tax penalties on a U.S. Army civilian employee is being studied to see what ramifications it could have for other Americans locked in financially devastating fights with German tax authorities. The Munich-based tribunal ruled in February 2021 that the finance court in Rheinland-Pfalz, home to the largest American military community outside the United States, had ignored provisions in a bilateral tax treaty that makes U.S. government pay off-limits to German tax collectors under certain circumstances.

The little-known case, only now coming to light publicly, centered on an unidentified active-duty soldier stationed in Germany in the 1990s. An American official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said 24 MAY that the U.S. is aware of the ruling and is analyzing its implications to determine whether it could be a model for others in Germany covered by NATO’s Status of Forces Agreement. At some point during the Germany tour of the former soldier in the case, he married a German and bought real estate, actions that tax offices view as grounds for targeting U.S. personnel regardless of their SOFA status. He was put in the taxing authority’s crosshairs after leaving the service and transitioning to an Army civilian job in Germany.

The case did not delve into the main dispute over whether SOFA offers blanket tax protection for U.S. personnel on orders in Germany. Still, the crux of the issue is an American’s motive for coming to Germany, according to the Munich court. Local tax offices have argued that if Defense Department employees are not in Germany “solely” for their job and have other ties to the country, such as a German spouse, they can be taxed as an ordinary German resident regardless of their SOFA protections. The Munich court asserted that “what is decisive is the point in time at which the applicant became resident in Germany.”

That means local tax officials “need to look at the reason for this person coming to Germany in the first place,” said Georg Weishaupt, a tax specialist representing three American families in separate SOFA-related tax cases. He analyzed the ruling for Stars and Stripes. If the American arrived in Germany “solely” for the job and later married a German or bought German real estate, military pay would be exempt from taxation, Weishaupt said. But arriving in Germany with a German spouse or anything else that could be perceived as a special tie to the country is

still problematic, he said. “(The court decision) doesn’t work for everybody,” Weishaupt said. “Maybe (the problem) has been solved for some people who are affected but not for all.”

It’s been nearly two years since the U.S. lodged a formal complaint about the tax issue facing hundreds of Americans with military ties in Germany, and the countries remain at a standstill on the matter. In the meantime, U.S. personnel have been left to their own devices to fight the tax collection efforts in court. The toll exacted by the assessments and costly legal challenges has left some Americans in financial ruin.

The unidentified U.S. official who spoke about the ruling said it doesn’t completely solve the issue for targeted Americans because it’s inapplicable in some scenarios. Weishaupt concurred that it is not a full remedy. He said the decision applies only to the family involved in the case at issue, so the question now is how local German tax offices will apply the ruling going forward. Still, the case could set a precedent for Americans in similar circumstances who find themselves in the sights of the German version of the IRS.

Among the personnel who could stand to benefit from the court’s decision are people who have been in Germany for an extended period, such as teachers in DOD schools, who often spend the bulk of their careers overseas and sometimes buy real estate in Germany, he said. Active-duty personnel who arrived in Germany with no special ties and later transitioned to a civilian posting in Germany also would benefit from the decision, Weishaupt said. However, the ruling would not help SOFA-protected contractors because the decision dealt only with Americans paid directly by the U.S. government. Also, service members or Defense Department civilian workers who marry a German while on tour or redeploy to a different country and return to Germany for another military assignment couldn’t use the ruling as a defense, he said.

Weishaupt said a more all-encompassing court decision is still needed to resolve the issue permanently. The Americans’ cases he has working their way through the German legal system center on the contention that local finance offices are basing their right to tax on a fundamental misreading of SOFA. “My position is anybody who is here under NATO SOFA is protected regardless of any intent or not to return to the U.S. or reasons for coming to Germany in the first place,” he said. “If my position holds in court, this issue dies and it dies for good.” [Source: Stars and Stripes | John Vandiver | May 25, 2022 ++]

Commissary Prices

Update 13: Lawmakers Urge DoD To Take Action To Curb Rising Prices

Lawmakers are urging Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to take steps to curb rising prices in military commissaries, as military families deal with inflationary grocery costs. Families across the country — including those at our military bases — are struggling with the rising costs of basic everyday needs,” said Rep. Marc Veasey (D-TX) in a 19 MAY announcement of a letter sent to Austin. He and Rep. Steven Horsford, (D-NV), spearheaded the effort, and the letter was signed by six additional Democratic colleagues. The lawmakers asked Austin to remove the requirement for commissaries to make a profit.

Removing that requirement would have an “immediate, direct impact for families, lowering their grocery bills and extending their pay as a non-pay compensation benefit, and reducing food insecurity and inflationary effects,” the lawmakers wrote. In essence, this would allow the Defense Commissary Agency to provide an additional cost saving of 3% to 5% over what customers currently enjoy, said Tom Gordy, president of the Armed Forces Marketing Council, an organization of more than 400 manufacturers that supply products to commissaries, exchanges and other military resale activities. In fiscal 2021, overall commissary savings were 22.7% compared to stores outside the gate, which is below the 23.7% commissary savings mandated by law.

Until 2017, commissary products were priced at the cost from the supplier, and the stores relied solely on taxpayer dollars to operate. A 5% surcharge on customers’ purchases was — and still is — used primarily to fund construction and renovation of commissary stores. The cost of store operations, such as employees’ salaries, are funded primarily by taxpayer dollars, typically around \$1.2 billion a year. But there was decades-long pressure within DoD to reduce or eliminate the amount of taxpayer dollars used to fund the commissary benefit. So DoD asked Congress to change the law to allow commissaries to start “variable pricing,” which gave them the ability to mark up prices on some products and mark down prices on others.

The goal has been to decrease the amount of taxpayer dollars required to operate stores, with profits generated by marking up the prices of items under variable pricing. The lawmakers are asking Austin to remove that DoD requirement for commissaries to make an overall profit. The commissaries generated a profit of \$108 million in fiscal 2021 with the higher prices, they stated, and “that is \$108 million out of our military families’ pockets.” In fiscal 2022, the commissary agency is expected to generate about \$119 million in profits, and the budget request for fiscal 2023 includes \$128 million in profits to offset the taxpayer funding.

The action requested wouldn’t require any new program to be implemented, lawmakers said. While the variable pricing method would still be used, the stores could mark down the prices of some products — even below the cost from the supplier, Gordy said. The commissary agency makes some profit from its private label, i.e., store brands, and these brands generally cost less

than national brands. That could offset any prices that are lower than what the supplier charges the commissary agency for national brands.

The commissary agency has launched a variety of efforts to try to provide more deals for customers, including a “Commissary Store Brands Price Shield Event” in May, offering at least a 20% price break on more than 900 commissary store brands. Commissary officials have also been dealing with shortages of products for a variety of reasons, including the nationwide supply chain issues. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 20, 2022 ++]

Rent-A-Bank Loans

Annual Interest Charges Of 96% To 189% Allowed by FDIC **Tax Laws**

Update 02: Strange but True | New York thru Washington DC

The United States tax code is anything but simple. The instructions for the standard 1040 tax form alone are more than 100 pages long, and good luck getting through them in one sitting. Tax rules and regulations at the state level provide no relief, riddled as they are with strange fees and exemptions, some of them decades out of date. Every state has odd and sometimes unbelievable state tax laws — including a number of regulations that could save consumers money.

New York: Any Way You Slice It

Looking forward to a delicious New York City bagel? Those who want it prepared — toasted, sliced, covered with cream cheese, or altered in any way — have to pay the 8.875% tax that applies to processed foods. An unsliced bagel to go, however, isn't taxed.

North Carolina: Taxing High Crimes, Too

The Tar Heel State also has a tax on illicit substances ranging from moonshine to marijuana. As the state department of revenue website points out, paying for the state tax stamp doesn't mean the drugs are legal, it just means the tax has been paid. Somewhat ironically for those possessing the illegal drugs, the bulk of the revenue from the stamps goes to law enforcement.

North Dakota: Have It for a Song

A musical composition performing tax levies 5% on the sale and licensing of performing rights for music and dramatico-musical compositions. The tax is based on gross receipts from the previous year.

Ohio: Going Organic

Ohio doesn't tax human organs, bones, blood, or other parts for transfusing or transplanting. But sales tax applies to human hair and animal parts for transplantation and implantation.

Oklahoma: Taxing the Tangible

Most states have property taxes, but several counties in Oklahoma stand out because they tax personal possessions that aren't used to generate income. Even basic household items, such as furniture, could be subject to the "tangible personal property" tax.

Oregon: Going to Pot

Oregon started issuing marijuana licenses to retailers and lowered the state sales tax for recreational marijuana to 17% from 25% in October 2016. Municipalities can add up to 3% local sales tax on recreational marijuana, but medical marijuana is exempt from local and state sales tax.

Pennsylvania: After the Flood

The Keystone State has an 18% sales tax on liquor. While taxing booze isn't odd, the tax, initially 10%, was created specifically to pay for the repair of the city of Johnstown after a flood in 1936. Those repairs were completed in 1942, but the tax remains. So while death and taxes may be inevitable, taxes can take on a life of their own and live on indefinitely.

Rhode Island: Emoticon Tax Form

The Rhode Island individual income tax return form (RI-1040) features emoticons. A smiley face appears on the "Amount Overpaid" (refund) line, while a frowny face is shown on the "Total Amount Due" line.

South Carolina: The Carcass Credit

Hunters who also have a license or permit to operate as a meat packer, butcher, or processing plant could get a \$75 tax credit per carcass they donate to charity. The deer has to be prepared for consumption and the taxpayer must have a contract with a nonprofit to qualify for the credit.

South Dakota: Income Untaxed

The bad news: South Dakota doesn't give tax breaks for contributions to in-state 529 college savings plans. The good news: It's because the state doesn't have an income tax.

Tennessee: Prepare Yourself

Foods that aren't prepared by the seller come with a 7% state sales tax. This includes baby food, dips, and some spreads. Livestock feed is exempt from sales and use taxes, though.

Texas: Holiday Spirit

Holiday greenery, such as wreaths, mistletoe, and Christmas trees, are all subject to sales tax in Texas — but not when bought from a charitable organization. Another way to lessen holiday taxes is to hire a decorating service and provide the decorations. If the company supplies them, both materials and labor are taxable.

Utah: Pole Tax

Although the rule was appealed all the way to the Utah Supreme Court, there is a 10% tax on fees charged by businesses such as strip clubs that have nude or partially nude workers. The tax also applies to food and drink sold by the establishment.

Vermont: No Curb Appeal

Street performers, keep your wallets handy. In Burlington, Vermont's largest city, the City Council may tax "the exhibition of common showmen, circuses, menageries, carnivals, and shows of every kind, and all plays, athletic contests, exhibitions, or entertainments for money."

Virginia: Back-to-School Corsets

Like many states, Virginia has an annual back-to-school tax holiday weekend. But Virginia's list of tax-free goods has been known to include an odd array of items: fur coats, lingerie, garters and garter belts, wedding apparel, aprons, and corsets, to name a few, eligible with sale prices of \$100 or less.

Washington: Yes Then No Income Tax

Residents of Washington were once hugely in favor of an income tax law, with 70% voting not once but twice in favor of it, during the Great Depression. How popular was the income tax? Only 62% of voters wanted to repeal Prohibition, which was on the same ballot. But when the law was challenged by well-off business owners and got held up in the state supreme court, everyone had time to read the new income tax forms and suddenly the law that many thought would be easily approved was deemed unconstitutional — and Washingtonians voted against an income tax ever since.

West Virginia: Fireworks Fee

West Virginia legalized additional types of fireworks, such as roman candles and bottle rockets, in 2016. A 12% "safety fee" (in addition to sales tax) came along with the legalization. The money raised from the fee helps support veterans and volunteer fire departments.

Wisconsin: Internet Tax

As of last year, Wisconsin was one of just a few states that taxed internet access. That's illegal according to federal law, but Wisconsin secured a grandfather exemption and could continue the tax through June 30, 2020. The amount varied depending on the type of service (dial-up, DSL, cable, etc.) After last year's deadline, it was no longer taxable.

Wyoming: Sweet Deal

Wyoming considers candy (including mints and gum) food and exempts it from sales tax. Gift sets and holiday baskets are also exempt if more than 50% of the product's value comes from exempt foods.

Washington, D.C.: Mixed Message

The nation's capital apparently has mixed feelings when it comes to healthy habits. Both gyms and sugary drinks draw a tax of around 5.75% and 8% respectively, though there have been efforts to lift the "yoga tax."

[Source: Cheapism | Louis DeNicola | March 03, 2022++]

Unclaimed Money Scams

What To Do If Your Facebook Friend Claims You're Owed Workers' Comp

Have you ever daydreamed about receiving a sudden windfall? You aren't alone, and scammers know it. In this new trick, scammers are using Facebook to con people into thinking they have thousands of dollars in unclaimed workers' compensation, according to recent [BBB Scam Tracker reports](#).

How this scam works

- A scammer [impersonates one of your Facebook friends](#) and sends you a message. They allegedly saw your name on a list of people who are owed workers' compensation. Lucky you! They also provide the phone number of a person who can help you collect the money.
- You think the information came from a trusted friend, so you make the call. The “agent” sounds professional—at first. They either confirm that you are owed money or asks you to pay a small fee so they can check. They may claim to have an official sounding title, such as “Workers’ Compensation Appeals Board member” or a “Federal Treasury Reserve official.”
- However, when you inquire about claiming the money, things get suspicious. The “agent” you are speaking with asks you to pay a “delivery” or “case file” fee up front. They may even give you your choice of payout amounts. Of course, the bigger the payout, the higher the fee. In most cases, they will ask you to wire the fees or send the money in prepaid debit cards.
- One victim reported: “They sent me a form to complete. They asked for my name, address, phone number, date of birth, and more. Then they said you have to pay a delivery fee, which must be paid upfront to process your application. They listed the fees as \$600 for \$50,000, \$100 for \$100,000, all the way up to \$10,000 for \$1 million and said, 'kindly get back to us with the amount you would like to apply for.'”
- Of course, if you send money to the scammer, they will either take the money and disappear or think up reasons to ask for more money. One thing is for sure, the workers’ compensation money in this scam doesn’t exist, and you won’t get paid.

How to spot these scams:

- **Watch out for fake friends.** If scammers can see your friends list, they can create a fake account that looks like it is one of your trusted friends. If you get an unusual request or a strange offer from a Facebook friend, contact that person directly to find out if they’ve been hacked - before you take any further action.
- **Never pay money to get money.** If a legitimate business or governmental organization owes you money, you won’t have to pay any fees to get it. Asking for fees to provide a payout is a common scam tactic.
- **If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.** Another common scam ploy is to offer the victim easy money they won’t have to work for. If someone offers you \$1,000 and all you have to do is pay \$100, it’s a scam.
- Read more tips in the [complete Scam Alert on BBB.org](#).

For more information

Read [BBB Tip: Sweepstakes, Lottery, and Prize Scams](#). These scams use tactics similar to this workers’ comp con. Learn more ways to protect yourself from scams at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](#). If you’ve spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your

report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](https://www.bbb.org/spotascam).

[Source: Better Business Bureau | May 20, 2022 ++]

Dental Scams

Spot red flags when looking for dental deals

Dental work can be expensive, insurance or not, and scammers know it. Recently, [BBB Scam Tracker](#) has received multiple reports from people who were scammed by con artists claiming to offer expensive dental equipment at discounted rates.

How this scam works

- You do an online search for a retainer, dental veneers, or another kind of dental equipment. You find an online ad that looks legitimate and click on it to visit the website. The website may feature high-quality customer videos that seem convincing. Best of all, the price is right. You'll only pay a few hundred dollars instead of the thousands your dentist quoted you.
- Once you place your order, the charge appears on your credit card, and the business claims your order is on its way. If the order does arrive at all, consumers report that it comes long after your credit card's dispute limit has expired.
- For example, [one victim reported](#):: "The first indication of something not quite right was the length of time to receive the product, which was nearly a full month later! Plus, they advertised a California location, but the tracking number for my package indicated the origination point was China. When the item finally arrived, the veneers were total junk. You could find teeth like these in any Halloween costume display. It's a total misrepresentation from the online ad."
- If you try to contact the company's customer service, you'll quickly find it doesn't exist. The company will be unreachable, and you likely lost all that money for good.

How to spot these scams

- Research a company before you buy. A quick internet search of the business name and "complaints" or "scam" could reveal you're dealing with a less than honest vendor.

Always do thorough research on a company before making a purchase, especially if it's one you haven't heard of it before.

- Be wary of online ads. Search engine results and social media often feature online ads that are eye-catching and appear professional. While many legitimate businesses advertise this way, scammers do too, so don't take every ad at face value.
- Don't fall for deals that are too good to be true. Many a scam victim fell for a great deal that didn't turn out to be great at all. Scammers love to offer high-dollar products (like dental equipment) at prices way lower than the actual cost.
- Pay with your credit card. When paying with a credit card, you can usually dispute fraudulent charges. Be sure you know your dispute time limit though. If a company hasn't delivered by the date they promised, it's time to file a dispute

For more information

Review [BBB's Tip on smart online shopping](#) for more ways to protect yourself from scams when shopping online. Read more about [spotting scam social media ads](#). If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](#).

[Source: Better Business Bureau | May 27, 2022 ++]

Car MPGe

What You Should Know About It

MPGe stands for miles per gallon equivalent. Unlike a gas car's MPG, which can be calculated using a simple formula, such a figure is not obtainable when a battery from a hybrid, plug-in hybrid, or fully electric vehicle uses electricity as its fuel source. That's why the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) came up with the unit of measurement for the electric car's energy consumption level to compare with gas-powered vehicles. Every window sticker at the dealership is federally mandated to show the MPGe when it's an electrified car or MPG when it's a gas-fueled vehicle.

How It Is Calculated

When the EPA devised MPGe in the early 2000s, the government agency calculated that 33.7 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity is comparable to a gallon of fuel in terms of its energy content. True, pulling 33.7 kWh of electricity from the grid in a place dependent on coal power

is not quite the same as using wind power. But such an average makes for a more reasonable comparison applicable to drivers. For example, a car that uses 33.7 kWh of electricity to travel 100 miles rates 100 MPGe. This is simple enough for fully electric cars that do not contain an internal combustion engine.

The math gets more tricky for a PHEV such as a Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid or a Toyota Prius Prime. These vehicles use an MPGe rating when driven on electric power only, plus conventional MPG ratings that apply when their batteries are depleted and their gas engine kicks on. MPGe is an important way to compare how efficient an electrified car is because it is directly linked to how much it costs to charge up the vehicle and how much power the EV needs to draw from the grid to top off its battery. To be clear, good MPGe ratings don't necessarily mean the best electric range. Instead, a high MPGe rating shows that a car makes the best use of its electrical power.

MPGe vs. MPG

When it comes to MPGe for electric vehicles and MPG for gasoline-powered cars, they might seem very similar. But there's a big difference between the two. The [formula for MPGe](#) can be calculated like this: 33.7 kWh of electricity = 1 gallon of gas. Some cars can get 100 MPGe. However, this can be misleading if you are looking at this number for how much money you will be spending on fill-ups. It would be more accurate to look at the car's 5-Year Cost to Own at <https://www.kbb.com/new-cars/total-cost-of-ownership> and calculate how much your home electricity bill would be.

On the flip side, MPG is the gas equivalent to electric power. This number can be significantly lower than electrified cars. A car with 35 miles per gallon is considered to be great. EVs can get 100 MPGe with ease. The miles per gallon formula works like this: miles driven divided by gallons used = mpg. This formula is much easier to understand.

Battery-Powered Electric Cars with the Best MPGe

Expect this list to change rapidly over the next few years as battery-powered electric vehicles become more common, more energy-efficient, and more advanced. According to the EPA, here's a look at some of the top cars for the 2021 model year with the best MPGe, including their estimated annual fueling (using electricity and a 15,000-mile annual estimate) cost and their estimated electric range:

- 2021 Tesla Model 3 Standard Range Plus: 142 MPGe – \$450 (\$2,500) – 263 miles
- 2021 Tesla Model 3 Long Range AWD: 134 MPGe – \$500 – 353 miles
- 2021 Hyundai Ioniq Electric: 133 MPGe – \$500 – 170 miles
- 2021 Tesla Model Y Standard Range: 129 MPGe – \$500 – 244 miles

- 2021 Tesla Model Y Long Range AWD: 125 MPGe – \$550 – 326 miles
- 2021 Hyundai Kona Electric: 120 MPGe – \$550 – 258 miles
- 2021 Tesla Model S Long Range: 120 MPGe – \$550 – 405 miles
- 2021 Chevrolet Bolt EV: 118 MPGe – \$550 – 259 miles
- 2021 BMW i3: 113 MPGe – \$600 – 153 miles
- 2021 Tesla Model 3 Performance AWD: 113 MPGe – \$600 – 315 miles

What MPGe cannot offer is a price comparison since the cost of a kWh varies considerably by location. Instead, a new EV's window sticker shows an estimated annual electric cost that can be compared with one on a new gas-fueled model. Such information is factored into Kelly Blue Book's own Total Cost of Ownership Tool, a useful way to compare how much a vehicle will cost an average driver over five years.

[Source: Kelly Blue Book | Andrew Ganz | September 8, 2021 ++]

Notes of Interest

MAY 16 thru 31, 2022

- **Recession.** A business cycle contraction when there is a general decline in economic activity. Recessions generally occur when there is a widespread drop in spending (an adverse demand shock). This may be triggered by various events, such as a financial crisis, an external trade shock, an adverse supply shock, the bursting of an economic bubble, or a large-scale anthropogenic or natural disaster (e.g. a pandemic). In the United States, it is defined as "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the market, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale-retail sales" In the United Kingdom, it is defined as a negative economic growth for two consecutive quarters. Governments usually respond to recessions by adopting expansionary macroeconomic policies, such as increasing money supply or increasing government spending and decreasing taxation.
- **Sanctions.** Canada on 17 MAY introduced a bill in the Senate that will ban Russian President Vladimir Putin and some 1,000 other members of his government and military from entering the country as it continues to ratchet up sanctions after the invasion of Ukraine.
- **Russia Military Enlistment.** Russia's parliament has passed a law scrapping an upper age limit for people signing up to join the army, in a sign Moscow may be looking to recruit more troops for its military campaign in Ukraine. Under current legislation,

Russians aged 18 to 40 and foreign nationals aged 18 to 30 have the right to sign their first military service contract.

- **60 Year Old Fire.** The Centralia mine fire is a coal-seam fire that has been burning in the labyrinth of abandoned coal mines underneath the borough of Centralia, Pennsylvania, United States, since at least May 27, 1962. Its original cause is still a matter of debate. It is burning in underground coal mines at depths of up to 300 ft over an 8 mi stretch of 3,700 acres. At its current rate, it could continue to burn for over 250 years. It has caused most of the town to be abandoned: by 2017 the population had dwindled to a mere five residents from around 1,500 at the time the fire started, and most of the buildings have been razed.
- **Bloodiest Battles.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTe-ty1LSrY> to learn about 10 Of The Bloodiest Battles In History

[Source: Various | May 31, 2022 ++]

Cybercrime

Update 01: Costa Rico Government Attacked by Russian Hacking Cartel

A Russian hacking cartel carried out an extraordinary cyberattack against the government of Costa Rica, crippling tax collection and export systems for more than a month so far and forcing the country to declare a state of emergency. The ransomware gang Conti, which is based in Russia, claimed credit for the attack, which began on 12 APR, and has threatened to leak the stolen information unless it is paid \$20 million. Experts who track Conti's movements said the group had recently begun to shift its focus from the United States and Europe to countries in Central and South America, perhaps to retaliate against nations that have supported Ukraine.

Some experts also believe Conti feared a crackdown by the United States and was seeking fresh targets, regardless of politics. The group is responsible for more than 1,000 ransomware attacks worldwide that have led to earnings of more than \$150 million, according to estimates from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. "The ransomware cartels figured out multinationals in the U.S. and Western Europe are less likely to blink if they need to pay some ungodly sum in order to get their business running," said Juan Andres Guerrero-Saade, a principal threat researcher at SentinelOne. "But at some point, you are going to tap out that space."

Whatever the reason for the shift, the hack showed that Conti was still acting aggressively despite speculation that the gang might disband after it was the target of a hacking operation in the early days of Russia's war on Ukraine. The criminal group, which pledged its support to Russia after the invasion, routinely targets businesses and local government agencies by breaking into their systems, encrypting data and demanding a ransom to restore it. Of the Costa Rica hacking, Brett Callow, a threat analyst at Emsisoft, said that "it's possibly the most significant

ransomware attack to date. This is the first time I can recall a ransomware attack resulting in a national emergency being declared,” he said. Costa Rica has said it refused to pay the ransom.

The hacking campaign occurred after Costa Rica’s presidential elections and quickly became a political cudgel. The previous administration downplayed the attack in its first official news releases, portraying it as a technical problem and projecting an image of stability and calm. But the newly elected president, Rodrigo Chaves, began his term by declaring a national emergency. “We are at war,” Mr. Chaves said during a news conference on 16 MAY. He said 27 government institutions had been affected by the ransomware attack, nine of them significantly.

The attack began on 12 APR, according to Mr. Chaves’s administration, when hackers who said they were affiliated with Conti broke into Costa Rica’s Ministry of Finance, which oversees the country’s tax system. From there, the ransomware spread to other agencies that oversee technology and telecommunications, the government said this month. Two former officials with the Ministry of Finance, who were not authorized to speak publicly, said the hackers were able to gain access to taxpayers’ information and interrupt Costa Rica’s tax collection process, forcing the agency to shut down some databases and resort to using a nearly 15-year-old system to store revenue from its largest taxpayers. Much of the nation’s tax revenue comes from a relatively small pool of about a thousand major taxpayers, making it possible for Costa Rica to continue tax collection.

The country also relies on exports, and the cyberattack forced customs agents to do their work solely on paper. While the investigation and recovery are underway, taxpayers in Costa Rica are forced to file their tax declarations in person at financial institutions rather than relying on online services. Mr. Chaves is a former World Bank official and finance minister who has promised to shake up the political system. His government declared a state of emergency this month in response to the cyberattack, calling it “unprecedented in the country. We are facing a situation of unavoidable disaster, of public calamity and internal and abnormal commotion that, without extraordinary measures, cannot be controlled by the government,” Mr. Chaves’s administration said in its emergency declaration.

The state of emergency allows agencies to move more quickly to remedy the breach, the government said. But cybersecurity researchers said that a partial recovery could take months, and that the government may not ever fully recover its data. The government may have backups of some of its taxpayer information, but it would take some time for those backups to come online, and the government would first need to ensure it had removed Conti’s access to its systems, researchers said. Paying the ransom would not guarantee a recovery because Conti and other ransomware groups have been known to withhold data even after receiving a payment. “Unless they pay the ransom, which they have stated they have no intention of doing, or have backups that are going to enable them to recover their data, they are potentially looking at total, permanent data loss,” Mr. Callow said.

When Costa Rica refused to pay the ransom, Conti began threatening to leak its data online, posting some files it claimed contained stolen information. It is impossible to look at the decisions of the administration of the president of Costa Rica without irony,” the group wrote on its website. “All this could have been avoided by paying.” On 14 MAY, Conti raised the stakes, threatening to delete the keys to restore the data if it did not receive payment within a week. “With governments, intelligence agencies and diplomatic circles, the debilitating part of the attack is really not the ransomware. It’s the data exfiltration,” said Mr. Guerrero-Saade of SentinelOne. “You’re in a position where presumably incredibly sensitive information is in the hands of a third party.”

The breach, among other attacks carried out by Conti, led the U.S. State Department to join with the Costa Rican government to offer a \$10 million reward to anyone who provided information that led to the identification of key leaders of the hacking group. U.S. State Department spokesman, Ned Price, said in a statement. “In offering this reward, the United States demonstrates its commitment to protecting potential ransomware victims around the world from exploitation by cybercriminals.” [Source: New York Times | Kate Conger & David Bolaños | May 17, 2022 +]

Etiquette Rules

Much-Missed Manners That No One Seems To Follow Anymore

The older we get, the more we realize the world has definitely changed. Sure, progress is welcome, but when basic niceties fall by the wayside, it’s hard not to get nostalgic for what’s fallen out of favor. We offer a look at what’s been lost to time when it comes to etiquette, which can be defined as the customary code of polite behavior. Read on — and feel free to nod in recognition.

Your Party? You Pay

Unless the invite explicitly says otherwise, if you host a party, you're the one who should be paying. But these days, some people are receiving electronic requests for money to cover their "share" after a dinner party or some other get-together. Insanity. It's perfectly acceptable to let the host know that when you were invited, you did not expect to have to pay for your attendance.

Respecting ... Everyone

It used to be a given: You respect your elders (no matter how cranky that old neighbor might actually be). These days, not only are the elderly often disrespected but so are those in the service industries, immigrants, and just plain strangers. Let's bring back kindness and compassion.

Using Personal Titles

It's jarring when a young bank teller you've never seen before says, "Anything else, Mary?" Um, what happened to Mrs., Miss or even Ms.? Today's overly familiar way of life leaves a lot of people smarting when they are called by their first name without permission.

Opening the Car Door for a Lady

Your date opens the car door for you before going around to his side. Yes, kids, this used to happen. It's the same way when a couple would walk down a sidewalk, the man would always walk on the side nearer the road to protect his companion. Ah, the good old days when chivalry wasn't the exception.

The Proper Response

When you say thank you to most anyone in a store these days, especially millennials, the reply, invariably, is "No problem." Boils my blood. No, the correct response is "You're welcome."

A Proper Thank You

Making the time to write — yes, with pen, paper and a stamped envelope — a thank-you note or greeting card has, sadly, become a lost art. Texts, emails and e-cards have made "snail mail" greetings a thing of the past for far too many.

Dressing Appropriately

A quick glance might yield bedazzled jeans, cut-off shorts, miniskirts, bra straps, tight leggings, sports uniforms, flip-flops ... no, we're not talking about what's being worn at the local mall but rather a house of worship. Some say just being there should be enough, but many feel that what you wear shows how much you respect those around you and what brought you there in the first place.

Remembering to RSVP

The courtesy of a reply is requested ... and expected. Too many hostesses find themselves overbuying because they're not sure exactly how many guests to expect. Their other choice is to track down all those who were invited and put them on the spot.

Table Talk

You're at a table of, say, three couples. The server may need to make two trips to bring out everyone's entrees. Wait, what? You are already three bites into your lasagna before the whole table is served? Not cool — or polite. Etiquette notes that you don't eat until everyone at the table has their food in front of them. And when you do eat, please use the proper utensils.

Hats Off!

There was a time when most gentlemen wore hats, which they removed once inside. Today, most caps, fedoras and cowboy hats stay well in place on a man's head inside or out.

Stand Up for the Ladies

A woman at the table gets up to use the ladies' room, so the men stand up as a sign of respect. Huh? Yes, that was the way it used to be. And men also stood to greet a newcomer, too.

Shake on It

Falling out of favor in more recent months, the handshake has been on the wane for years. A simple nod or casual wave of the hand often suffices, even in business situations. Compounded by COVID-era safety protocols, the handshake's future really may be in peril.

[Source: Cheapism | Mary Shustack | April 1, 2022 ++]

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 220515

Which word best fits these example sentences?

- (a) Certain plants and fungi have a _____ triggered by sunlight.
(b) *trachea – tropism – traction - tract*
- (a) What is a synonym for “endue”?
(b) *grunt – grant – grain - granule*
- (a) Catfish eat _____ material like algae and scavenged debris.
(b) *bento – beer – benthic - belching*
- (a) Will took his _____ of old clothes to the nearest donation center.
(b) *fardel – fable – feral - feeble*

5. (a) What is a market situation in which there is only one buyer?
(b) *arbitrage – depreciation – monopoly - monopsony*
6. (a) The senator was a rising star in the party's _____.
(b) *tenement – proletariat – micromanagement - firmament*
7. (a) What is an antonym for macroscopic?
(b) *microscopic – microseismic – microcosmic - microsporic*
8. (a) What word describes someone who is “last but two” in a series?
(b) *penultimate – antepenultimate – pendulum - antecedent*
9. (a) What kind of relationship with a subject does “conversant” describe?
(b) *familiarity – factuality – fatigability - favorability*
10. (a) If you _____ the trees, they will provide more shade.
(b) *pleach – plead – pleat - pledge*

Answers

1. Tropism [TRO-piz-əm] - the turning of all or part of an organism in a particular direction in response to an external stimulus.
2. Grant [en-DOO] - Endow or provide with a quality or ability.
3. Benthic [BEN-thik] - Of, relating to, or occurring at the bottom of a body of water or in the depths of the ocean.
4. Fardel [FAR-dl] - (Archaic) A bundle.
5. Monopsony [mə-NAHP-sə-nee] – a market situation in which there is only one buyer.
6. Firmament [FER-mə-mənt] - a sphere or world viewed as a collection of people.
7. Macroscopic [mak-rə-SKA-pik] - Relating to large-scale or general analysis.
8. Antepenultimate [an-tə-pə-NUL-tə-mət] - last but two in a series; third last.
9. Conversant [kən-VER-sənt] - familiar with or knowledgeable about something.
10. Pleach [pleeCH] - Entwine or interlace (tree branches) to form a hedge or provide cover for an outdoor walkway.

[Source: www.wordgenius.com | May 31, 2022 ++]

News of the Weird

MAY 16 thru 31, 2022

Going to Extremes -- It was sooooo cold in Beijing during the men's 50km cross-country skiing event. How cold was it, you ask? It was so cold (1.4 degrees Fahrenheit) that Finland's Remi Lindholm, who spent an hour and 16 minutes covering the course, suffered some painful frostbite to an unspeakably delicate body part that was not insulated enough by his thin suit and underlayer, The Guardian reported. Yes, that one. He endured a similar setback in Ruka, Finland, last year. Lindholm said he used a heat pack to thaw out the "appendage" after the Feb. 19 race but "the pain was unbearable. ... It was one of the worst competitions I've been in." [The Guardian, 2/20/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

Ooohhh-kkkaaayyyyy -- Some romantic relationships are full of drama and strife, so maybe Sandra, 28, of Budapest, Hungary, has come up with a better model. According to Oddity Central, Sandra has fallen for Luffancs, a plastic model of an airplane. After breaking up with her latest human boyfriend in January, Sandra bought Luffancs for \$660 and fell madly in love. "I don't know why I love him, I just love him," she said. Sandra works in the aviation industry and is around airplanes every day, but says she will never cheat on Luffancs. In fact, she doesn't know if she'll ever date another human being. "Planes are more reliable as partners," she said. [Oddity Central, 3/10/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

Bright Idea -- For Alexander Leszczynski, 22, of North Redington Beach, Florida, it wasn't enough to be charged with wire fraud, bank fraud and money laundering, the Tampa Bay Times reported. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Tampa claimed Leszczynski might face up to 30 years in prison for making up charitable entities to receive Payroll Protection Plan loans totaling almost \$200,000 and trying to deposit fake checks to the tune of \$2.7 million, among other schemes. But wait, there's more! "When he discovered that the money had been frozen, he attempted to have it released by producing a fabricated pardon purportedly signed by former President Donald Trump," the U.S. Attorney's Office said in a news release. One of Leszczynski's fake charities was trying to seize control of two properties that belonged to Jeffrey Epstein, the disgraced financier who died in prison while awaiting trial on sex-trafficking charges. Leszczynski is being held without bail at the Pinellas County Jail. [Tampa Bay Times, 5/18/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

Wait, What? -- During a preliminary hearing on May 16 in Saginaw County (Michigan) District Court, a 32-year-old unidentified woman testified that her "friend with benefits," 29-year-old Cortez L. Gill, accidentally shot her once on Nov. 11 -- but then proceeded to shoot her

eight more times as she and her child struggled to escape him. MLive.com reported that the victim explained that she and Gill "tussled" over some car keys and he pulled out a gun, which he lowered to the ground. "The gun goes off and the bullet hit me ... in my abdomen. ... I was like, 'Cortez, I got hit. You have to call the police or get me in the car and take me to the hospital immediately.'" Instead, she said, Gill replied, "You see what you made me do?" and fired again at her, hitting her in the chest. She and her daughter ran outside, where she collapsed in a neighbor's yard. The next thing she remembers is waking up in a hospital on the day before Thanksgiving, where she learned that she had been shot nine times in total. Gill was bound over for trial. [MLive, 5/17/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

Crotch Shot -- Kingsland, Arkansas, about 70 miles south of Little Rock, is the birthplace of Johnny Cash, and the town has honored him with a silhouette of the Man in Black on its water tower, The Wichita Eagle reported. But when Betty Graham, water office manager, arrived at her office early on May 11, she noticed what she first thought was a leak from the tower. Later she realized a sharpshooter had hit the tank right at Cash's sweet spot, creating the illusion that the famous singer is relieving himself. Graham said it could take at least a week to repair the damage; in the meantime, comments on a local Facebook page ranged from "would be a better tourist attraction than Old Faithful" to "Someone here knows who did this. I hope they'll come forward and turn the vandal in." "People think it's funny, but a lot of hard work and effort went into getting the grant to get this painted," Graham said. [Wichita Eagle, 5/15/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

Skills -- Ayumi Takada, 37, of Tokyo, has been compared to Elastigirl from "The Incredibles" because of her incredibly elastic earlobes. Oddity Central reports that Ayumi can stretch her earlobes up to 4.5 centimeters, or about 1 1/2 inches -- enough to, say, wrap them around a selfie stick, a calligraphy brush or the shaft of an umbrella. It's practically like having another hand. "People always ask me if it's painful," she said. "But there's no pain at all when pulling them or holding an item. The earlobe naturally bounces right back into place straight away." [Oddity Central, 5/20/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

News You Can Use -- Students at Johns Hopkins University are putting their expensive education to good use. Whiting School of Engineering students have invented Taste Tape for their school's Engineering Design Day, United Press International reported. The chemical and biomolecular engineering students hope their invention will help themselves and others make their favorite foods less messy by taping burritos, tacos and other dishes closed, keeping the fillings inside. "All its

ingredients are safe to consume, are food-grade, and are common food and dietary additives," said team member Tyler Guarino. They are in the process of obtaining a patent. [UPI, 5/17/2022]

o-o-O-o-o-

Police Report -- Dawn LaShawn Laprade, 54, REALLY wanted to get away from cops on May 18 in Martin County, Florida, ClickOrlando.com reported. Laprade allegedly intentionally hit a sheriff's office vehicle as she tried to evade a traffic stop. Next, she drove up to 100 mph, hitting another patrol car and a civilian truck, injuring people inside, and motioned to officers that she had a gun. But the real coup de grace came when officers finally caught up to her and she threw a fake snake at them. Laprade was booked and held on \$90,000 bond. [ClickOrlando.com, 5/19/2022]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/oddties/news-of-the-weird/2022/05/20> | May 2022

Have You Heard or Seen?

Riddles 3 | Toons | Reagan Comments

Riddles 3

- 01) Q: I have seas with no waters, coasts with no sand, towns without people and mountains with no land. What am I?
- 02) Q: What cannot talk but will always reply when spoken to?
- 03) Q: if you have 3 apple and 4 oranges in one hand and 4 apples and 3 oranges in the other hand, what do you have?
- 04) Q: Mr. Smith has 4 daughters. Each of his daughters has a brother. How many children does Mr. Smith have?
- 05) Q: I am there once in a minute, twice in a moment but never in a thousand years. what am I?
- 06) Q: I can only live where there is light but I die if the light shines on me. What am i?
- 07) Q: A woman gave birth to twins yet, one was born in AMERICA and the other in INDIA. How?
- 08) Q: Two boys were born to the same mother, at the same time, same day, same month and year however they are not twin brothers. how can this be?

- 09) Q: A Butcher named Butch is 6 feet tall and has size 12 shoes. What does he weight?
- 10) Q: I am the beginning of the end, the end of every place. I am the beginning of eternity, the end of time and space?
- 11) Q: Can you figure out what this means? E Z I I I
- 12) Q: When is a door not a door?

Answers

- 12) A: When it is a jar
- 11) A: Easy on the eyes
- 10) A: The letter 'E'
- 09) A: Meat
- 08) A: There is one more child. They are triplets
- 07) A: The woman gave birth to two sets of twins. One set was born in America and the other set in India
- 06) A: Shadow
- 05) A: The letter 'M'
- 04) A: Five. Mr. Smith has 4 daughters and 1 son
- 03) A: Very large hands
- 02) A: An echo
- 01) A: A map
-

Reagan Comments

Think what you will of Ronald Regan and his politics but most cannot dispute the following comments of his regarding our government:

- 'Here's my strategy on the Cold War: We win, they lose.'
- 'The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'

- 'The trouble with our liberal friends is not that they're ignorant; it's just that they know so much that isn't so.'
- 'Of the four wars in my lifetime, none came about because the U.S. was too strong.'
- 'I have wondered at times about what the Ten Commandments would have looked like if Moses had run them through the U.S. Congress.'
- 'The taxpayer: That's someone who works for the federal government but doesn't have to take the civil service examination.'
- 'Government is like a baby: An alimentary canal with a big appetite at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other.'
- 'The nearest thing to eternal life we will ever see on this earth is a government program.'
- 'It has been said that politics is the second oldest profession. I have learned that it bears a striking resemblance to the first.'
- 'Government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it.'
- 'Politics is not a bad profession. If you succeed, there are many rewards; if you disgrace yourself, you can always write a book.'

[Source: Words of wisdom by Margaret Gee 2001 ++]

Thought of the Day

“The road to success is dotted with many tempting parking spaces.”

-- Will Rogers

-0-0-O-0-0-

FAIR USE NOTICE: This newsletter may contain copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Editor/Publisher of the Bulletin at times includes such material in an effort to advance reader's understanding of veterans' issues. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided

for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U. S. C. Section 107, the material in this newsletter is distributed without profit to those who have expressed an interest in receiving the included information for educating themselves on veteran issues so they can better communicate with their legislators on issues affecting them. To obtain more information on Fair Use refer to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this newsletter for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.